

**COUNCIL****Minutes of the Meeting held on 21 February 2024**

<b>Members:</b>	John Hinchcliffe (Chair)	Matthew Atkinson	Professor Shirley Congdon
	Dr Stewart Davies	Dame Sally Dicketts	Dr Paul Donovan
	Professor Maryann Hardy	Terry Hartwell	Professor Zahir Irani
	Kate Ireland	Hamza Khan	Simon Lewis
	Victoria McKay	Ibrahim Mahmood	Ash Mehta
	Sally Neocosmos	Professor Amir Sharif	Iqra Tabassum
<b>In Attendance:</b>	Steve Gilley	Director of Infrastructure (for item 40)	
	Jacqui Holgate	Head of Governance	
	Andrew Lang	Chief Finance Officer	
	Matthew Stephenson	Interim Associate Director, Governance, Legal and Risk	
<b>Apologies:</b>	Raja Waseem Ahmad	Faiz Ilyas	Sanjay Patel
	Professor Vishanth		
	Weerakkody		

**35.23-24 Welcome and Report from the Interim Chair**

- 35.1 The Interim Chair of Council formally welcomed Members to the meeting and provided some opening comments noting the increasingly complex and challenging environment in which the University, and the HE sector continued to operate, including the increased level of regulatory requirements placed upon universities, and the continued uncertainty on issues relating to funding, immigration, quality, and the approach to financial sustainability. The importance of developing and enhancing the reputation and brand of the University and the City was noted and this would be further explored at the Council Strategy event in late April.
- 35.2 The Interim Chair noted that a new search and recruitment process for a permanent Chair of Council was being undertaken and a procurement process to identify an executive search consultant had commenced. The University would work with the preferred consultant to develop a campaign in line with the University strategy and values and conduct a comprehensive search process to identify a high-quality, diverse field of candidates for the role of Chair, with an appointment being made by early summer.
- 35.3 The Interim Chair also provided an update on the status of the Council Effectiveness Review noting that a report and recommendations (to include examples of good and innovative practice in governance for HE and other sectors) was under development noting this would be based on fieldwork undertaken by GatenbySanderson in 2023, and as such it would provide a 'snapshot' in time.

36.23-24 **Vice-Chancellor Update Report (Document C42/23-24)**

- 36.1 Council considered the Vice-Chancellor's report in which she provided information on key matters affecting the University since the last meeting and against each of the University's sub-strategies. Among topics highlighted were:
- the external challenges faced by universities including increased costs, the fixed home undergraduate tuition fee, changes to student behaviours post pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis, and the fierce competition for home and international students.
  - the priority actions that were being implemented to address the University's financial challenges, noting that the University continued to be proactive in mitigating future risks, with an emphasis on high-quality, excellence, and sustainability.
  - the importance of enhancing the reach and reputation of the University.
  - that Executive Board had commenced a focussed piece of work which would lead to a simplified 'prioritisation roadmap' aligned to the current strategy with more focus on execution and enhanced decision making. This work was being supported by Sanjay Patel, not in his role as a Council member but in his capacity as a leader in strategic transformation. The Executive was fully engaged and committed to complete this work by the end of March. An update would be provided to Council at a future meeting.
  - the 3+9 forecast deficit noting this had been endorsed by Finance Committee.
- 36.2 The Vice-Chancellor reported that the new University Secretary, Martin Conway, would join the University in April, and that recruitment processes were underway for the Deans of Engineering and Digital Technologies, and the Health Studies. The recruitment process for a permanent Academic Registrar would commence in March.
- 36.3 Council discussed and welcomed the University's exploration with Bradford College regarding stronger partnership arrangements including progression pathways, joint work on recruitment, attainment work in schools, business engagement, and on maximising programme delivery, noting the confidential nature of this item.
- 36.4 It was expected that a growing number of HEIs would consider and/or explore partnerships, mergers, and acquisitions that may enhance academic offerings, improve student recruitment, and financial stability. Such endeavours were complex and not without risk. This would be further explored at a high level at a future meeting. It was also noted that all HEIs were required to have a Student Protection Plan in force and approved by the Office for Students under the OfS' regulatory framework.
- 36.5 Council sought clarification on the approach to vacancy approval noting that a set of principles had been established to guide and support the process. The increased vacancy factor which related to the staffing establishment and vacant posts was also discussed with Council noting the potential impact on workloads and that there was a tension to balance in this regard. The launch of the Bradford-Renduchintala Enterprise Ecosystem (BREE) initiative was noted with a more detailed overview of BREE, including the ambition and opportunities associated with it being presented to Council via an informal briefing

session. The importance of reducing duplication and maximising efficient deployment of resources was also noted.

**36.6 ACTIONS:**

- **provide update on 'prioritisation' work to future Council (Vice-Chancellor)**
- **present update on BREE via Council informal briefing session (Governance to schedule)**

**37.23-24 UBU (University of Bradford Union) Update Report (Document C43/23-24)**

37.1 Council discussed a report from the Students' Union on current issues and recent activities including refreshers week; student engagement; and the upcoming annual UBU elections which would take place in early March.

37.2 During discussion:

- it was noted that the Union was becoming more data driven in its approach and that student retention data was being considered noting that the UBU and University would continue to work in partnership to enhance and improve student retention and success.
- Council requested that the quarterly UBU reports be strengthened by providing more data to demonstrate the impact of activities and engagement; this would be incorporated into future reports.

**38.23-24 Student Recruitment (Document C44/23-24)**

38.1 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor provided a detailed briefing on student recruitment presenting an update on January 2024 enrolments and the September 2024 recruitment position following the post UCAS undergraduate home equal consideration deadline (ECD) of 31 January.

38.2 Approximately 79% of main-cycle applications had been received by the ECD noting there was a week's difference between the ECD this year from last. Whilst the number of applications remained similar to the previous year, and broadly in line with the sector, the University was outperforming its competitor set which was positive. It was estimated that around 900 interviews remain which continued to influence offer making. Interviews would be conducted in February and March.

38.3 Applications for the 2024/25 cycle continued to be received with around 21% of applications being made following the ECD (between February-June). Attention was now focussed on late applications and the operational and strategic interventions which sought to optimise recruitment and ensure the University was able to respond effectively to current and future recruitment challenges. The University would continue to seek to maximise its position, as outlined in the presentation, and an evaluation on the effectiveness of the interventions would be undertaken with a report being presented to Council in November.

38.4 During discussion, the following points were addressed:

- that successful recruitment was critical to the delivery of the University's financial plans noting that total student numbers in 2023/24 were around 15% lower than planned for.
- that declining student recruitment was replicated across the sector and reflected issues such as the cost of living, students' capacity for additional debt, and labour market conditions.
- that Clearing would be critical to optimise recruitment and had been identified as a priority project for the University. The University's approach to Clearing was being reviewed (noting that last year was the most successful year for Clearing) to ensure that a resilient and quality service was in place. A 'Clearing and Confirmation Plan' would be presented to Executive Board in April, for approval.
- that targeted activity had taken place in schools and colleges which had resulted in an increase in applications.
- the University's ambition to get more students from the main cycle of the undergraduate market with work continuing to ensure that the main scheme featured more significantly in future recruitment cycles.
- that a review of entry tariff for Clearing 2024 and 2025 entry had been undertaken and approved by Senate. This would ensure that tariffs were set competitively, but at a level which would not result in Bradford being regularly selected as an insurance choice.
- the significantly increased competition for institutions in middle to lower tariff groups noting the change in behaviour in many Russell Group universities with regards to tariff and foundation programmes.
- the importance of student retention and progression.
- that a review of the efficiency and performance of the University's current portfolio was underway to simplify, rationalise, and improve the teaching portfolio.
- the University's strategic approach to international recruitment and strategic partnerships and the measures being taken to deliver on these, noting the decline in international undergraduate and postgraduate applications. Contributing factors included the volatility and challenging international environment, changes to UKVI regulations and the dependence of the international market on changes in immigration policy, increased competition leading to changes in tariff, and other recruitment incentives across the sector.
- that the University continued to diversify its international markets in order to manage business risks and increase student diversity.
- the management of scholarships and bursaries for maximum efficiency within an inclusive environment and in line with the University's values was also noted.

38.5 Given that the University had received broadly the same number of applications (as compared to February 2023) the Deputy Vice-Chancellor confirmed the University was following a trajectory to achieve its home undergraduate student number target in 2024/25 acknowledging that this target had been adjusted downwards and did not align to the five-year plan approved by Council in July 2023. Council was assured that detailed application and decision data for 2024/25 would continue to be monitored closely by Executive Board, with a continued focus on conversion, late applications, and Clearing to maximise recruitment.

38.6 Having noted the importance of student recruitment, and the integral part it played in the strategy debate, Council requested that an update on application data for September 2024 entry, across all the market segments, be provided in late March via email circulation.

38.7 **ACTIONS:**

- present update report on the latest position in late March via email circulation (Deputy Vice-Chancellor)
- present update on effectiveness of targeted interventions in November with regards to what has/hasn't worked (Deputy Vice-Chancellor)
- schedule Council in late February 2025 to ensure the most update position is presented to Council following the post UCAS equal consideration deadline of 31 January 2025 (Governance to schedule)

39.23-24 **Financial Update Incorporating 3+9 Forecast (Document C45/23-24)**

39.1 [Redacted]

39.2 [Redacted]

39.3 [Redacted]

39.4 [Redacted]

39.5 [Redacted]

39.6 [REDACTED]

39.7 [REDACTED]

Note: The above minute has been redacted as it is considered to be exempt information as defined by section 43 (2) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 which covers commercial interests

40.23-24 **City Centre District Heat Scheme (Document C46/23-24)**

40.1 The Director of Infrastructure joined the meeting to provide an overview of the City Centre District Heat Scheme noting this was a transformational project and fundamental to a number of activities, including accelerating the University's route to its net zero commitment, aligned to its strategic intent.

40.2 Council reflected on the report noting that a high-level proposal had been considered by the Finance Committee and Executive Board who had endorsed the recommendation to proceed with the development of a full business case.

40.3 The risks and opportunities for the University were debated by Council and points of note included:

- that the University heating infrastructure was old and posed a risk to ongoing business operations, noting the cost to replace the University system was significant.
- the cost implications associated district heating scheme were discussed noting investment of £1.48M capital funding would supplement the £6.5M awarded from the Salix; this represented an 83% reduction in cost to the University.
- that to be viable, it required the load from the University and Bradford Courts which meant a coordination of commitment to enter the scheme was critical to its success.
- the importance of having a robust commercial/legal agreement to safeguard the interests of the University, noting the risks associated with outsourcing the provision of heating to a third-party operator; Mills and Reeve had been appointed to ensure legal documentation was fit for purpose and to manage contractual relationships.
- that 1Energy were a new entrant to the district heating market and Council requested that appropriate, and detailed due diligence be undertaken on 1Energy and others involved.
- to have a 'Plan B' in place with regards to project delay and/or in the event of an emergency.

- the potential link to the Faculty of Engineering and Digital Technologies with regards to teaching, learning and research opportunities, and potential site visits.

40.4 The report reflected the extent of the work that had been undertaken to date, and the level of engagement, noting this was a significant and innovative project undertaking with a commercial and engineering legacy of 20 year plus. Following a robust discussion, Council **agreed in principle** to connecting to a centralised city-wide scheme and **delegated authority for full approval** of the business case to the Interim Chair of Council, the Vice-Chancellor, the Chair of Audit Committee, the Treasurer and Chair of Finance Committee, and the Chief Finance Officer following further consideration and assurance regarding costings and financial analysis, contract and legal/commercial agreement, due diligence, and project management arrangements to confirm the works (on-and-off site) would be synchronised thus ensuring any impact on University was mitigated. An update would be provided to Council in due course.

41.23-24 [Redacted]

41.1 [Redacted]

41.2 [Redacted]

41.3 [Redacted]

41.4 [Redacted]

The above minute has been redacted as it is considered to be exempt information as defined by section 43 (2) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 which covers commercial interests

42.23-24 **Assurance Report on OfS B Conditions of Registration (Document C48/23-24)**

- 42.1 Council deferred discussion of the report noting this would be considered in detail at the Council Informal Briefing on 22 March.

43.23-24 **University Secretary Report (Document C49/23-24)**

- 43.1 Council received a report on the ongoing work related to areas of governance relevant to Council and the University. Following consideration of the report, Council **approved**:
- the recommendations for Honorary Awards set out in Appendix A of the report.
  - the Research Concordat, 2023 Annual Report on Progress.
  - the authorisation for the Acting Associate Director, Governance, Legal and Risk to sign in place of the University Secretary during the period between departure of the previous University Secretary and the start of the new University Secretary.

44.23-24 **Reports from Senate, and Council Committees (Documents C50-56/23-24)**

- 44.1 Council received the summary reports from Senate, Audit Committee, Finance Committee, University Ethics Committee, Governance and Nominations Committee, Honorary Awards Committee, and People Committee.

45.23-24 **KPI Report (Document C57/23-24)**

- 45.1 Council received an update report on the University's key performance indicators.

46.23-24 **Safeguarding and Prevent Update (Document C58/23-24)**

- 46.1 Council received an update report on Safeguarding and Prevent, noting the continued work in this area.

47.23-24 **Register of Interests (Document C59/23-24)**

- 47.1 Council received and noted the report.

48.23-24 **Minutes of the Meeting on 29 November 2023 (Document C60/23-24)**

- 48.1 The minutes of the meetings held on the 29 November 2023 were approved by circulation prior to the meeting.

49.23-24 **Action Tracker (Document C61/23-24)**



49.1 Council received a report on matters arising from the Council meeting on 29 November 2023 and the actions taken since that meeting to address them.

50.23-24 **Terms of Reference and Membership 2023/24 (Document C62/23-24)**

50.1 Council received and noted the report.

51.23-24 **Draft Council 3 Agenda, 15 May 2024 (Document C63/23-24)**

51.1 Council received and noted the report.

52.23-24 **Council Schedule of Business (Document C64/23-24)**

52.1 Council received and noted the report.

Secretary: Jacqui Holgate, Head of Governance

Date: March 2024