

NORWICH UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS

COUNCIL

Minutes of the Council

Minutes of the meeting of Council held in the Conference Suite, 20 Bank Plain, Norwich, NR2 4SF, on Friday 18 November 2022, commencing at 10.00.

Present:

Mr M Jeffries (Chair)
 Ms C Armor
 Dr S Bradshaw
 Ms R Chakraborty
 Ms A Ferguson
 Mr A Grimby
 Mr C Lawrence
 Prof. S Ofield-Kerr
 Mr K Pink
 Ms J Simpson
 Mr L Smith
 Mr I Watson
 Mr L Wells
 Mr T Wilson
 Mr T Wood
 Ms G Young

In attendance:

Prof. L Anderson, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic)
 Ms A Beckett, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) and Academic Registrar
 Prof. H Carlisle, Dean of Creative Education
 Prof. L Nixon, Dean of Research and Knowledge Exchange
 Mr J Smeeth, Chief Operating Officer
 Mr D Williams (Clerk)

Apologies:

Ms C Bray
 Prof. Lady R Cooper

CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME

The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming the new staff governors who were attending their first meeting of Council.

The Chair invited Mr Lawrence to share his thoughts on spending the previous day meeting with staff and students of University. The day had enabled Mr Lawrence to gain a better understanding of the University and its work. The experience had been highly beneficial.

The Vice-Chancellor repeated the invitation for governors to spend a day at the University, to view facilities and meet with staff and students. There was no intention of trying to over-curate visits by governors, and the University was happy to accommodate governors at their convenience.

1. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

The Council approved the minutes of the meeting held on 30 September 2022. The Chair signed the minutes.

2. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

There were no matters arising.

PART 1

3. VICE CHANCELLOR

3.1 Vice Chancellor's Policy and Performance Update

The Vice Chancellor (VC) provided an update on higher education policy and associated challenges.

A new minister for Higher Education had been appointed. The minister was known to be strongly in favour of apprenticeships. When considering whether to respond to changes in government policy it was important to assess whether announcements made by ministers were likely to be actioned before the next General Election.

The government's autumn statement contained two positive announcements for higher education. The level of research and development funding had been maintained, and the role of higher education institutions (HEIs) in tackling economic "cold spots" recognised.

Government policy to encourage short-course learning was expected to continue. HEIs faced competition from established private-sector providers, and challenges in marketing provision. The University was aiming to incorporate its provision within the strategy for post-graduate taught courses. The intention was to offer short courses, with the option of building towards to a full qualification.

The government was likely to expect HEIs to do more with schools.

In regard to the policy context the challenge was to identify and assess longer-term trends, as opposed to ministerial announcements, which were unlikely to be progressed.

The VC updated Council on the forthcoming industrial action by staff. The impact of the action on students and their learning was difficult to assess. The University would shortly be communicating with all students on the matter. As a member of the employers' national negotiating body, the University was expected to abide by the agreed position. Staff would be required to self-report their participation in the industrial action and would lose pay. The University would consider allocating the pay deducted from staff, as a result of the industrial action, to support student-facing services.

VC

The University had appointed the company North to work on its re-branding strategy. Mr Wood had been a member of the selection panel.

North had already demonstrated a highly level of enthusiasm and commitment to working with the University. A number of graduates of the University were employed by North, and heavily engaged with the task. The VC would provide an update on progress at the next meeting of the Council.

VC

The cost of living crisis and its impact on students was discussed. The University and students' union were working closely on the problem.

The students' union had expanded the provision of food and refreshments in the commuter kitchen, and had established a food pantry for students in need. These actions had been well received by students.

The responses instigated by the University and students' union were much greater than those being taken by many HEIs. Members suggested it might be helpful to establish the financial costs of the provision being provided by the University and the students' union.

To respond to urgent calls for help, the University would trial a scheme offering ASDA food vouchers to students. This was not intended to replace the existing bursary support scheme, but facilitate immediate help.

Council noted that the financial context for students was likely to remain difficult for the next 2/3 years, and that it was important to ensure support could be sustained over the time-frame.

The Chair thanked the VC for his report, which Council received.

3.2 Presentation – Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy

Professor Nixon presented to Council on the University's draft Research (R) and Knowledge Exchange (KE) Strategy. The RKE strategy was a sub-strategy of the University's corporate strategy. While the broad thrust of the strategy had been agreed, the details were subject to further development.

The strategy was intended to run for 5-years, and be part of a 10-year vision.

The rationale for engaging in R and KE and the University's current performance in each area were reviewed.

Responding to the University's operational plan, a key aim was to embed R and KE within the University. These activities had previously been largely viewed as separate and discrete.

The operational plan envisaged a significant growth in level of R and KE activity.

A separate careers and employment strategy would be developed.

RKE activity would build on existing projects. A key theme was working on local issues that have global significance. RKE activity needed to be relevant to Norwich and Norfolk.

RKE activity would also enable the development of a stronger Civic presence. This was linked to the development of the Creative Quarter and enhanced engagement with external stakeholders.

Working with partners was an important aspect of the strategy.

The plan was to establish three R and KE Institutes. Two of the Institutes would build on existing activities, with a third to be chosen.

The establishment of the first two Institutes would draw on grant funding of £800k received by the University from Research England. The funding had been awarded for a period of three years (2022/23 to 2024/25), but was expected to be continued beyond this date. The monies would, for example, enable the appointment of Institute Directors, RKE fellows and support staff, provide seed funding and fund studentships and fellowships.

When engaging with private sector organisations, members suggested it would be important to frame the RKE strategy in terms that would appeal to businesses. This should focus on the potential benefits for business, showing how engagement with the University offered value-for-money.

These factors would need to be communicated strongly to the business community.

The Chair thanked Professor Nixon for his presentation.

3.3 Council Performance Indicators

The Council considered the performance indicators. Against the targets agreed within the operational plan a number of the non-financial indicators were shown as “red”. By comparison, financial indicators were shown as “green”, with targets being achieved or surpassed.

The profile of the indicators suggested that some aspects of the University’s activities might have been subject to previous under-investment.

The targeted levels of performance for some indicators in the later years looked challenging.

The performance indicators were linked to the risk register. The risk register would allow Council to review the actions being taken to mitigate the risk of inadequate performance during the year.

The results of the National Student Survey (NSS) would enable an assessment of the impact of University’s Baseline initiative, which included a number of academic Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), to be made. Interim results would not be available to enable an earlier assessment.

Council noted the Council Performance Indicators.

3.5 Academic Board Minutes

Council received the minutes of the meeting of the Academic Board held on 12 October 2022.

4. PRESS

4.1 Press coverage

The Press coverage was noted.

5. STUDENT MATTERS

5.1 Students’ Union Report

The President of the students’ union (SU) drew Council’s attention to a number of matters.

The Union had received a very positive response to the night-time safety packs.

A major focus of the President’s work was the future of the Students’ Union. This included possible changes to the Union’s legal status and governance, and an assessment of future resource needs. Work on the Union’s legal structure would take place ahead of any proposals to change the resource base. The University had provided funds for a specialist external consultant to support the review of the Union’s legal status and governance.

The VC confirmed that the University wanted to invest in the Union. The outturn to the current review, might suggest that the most appropriate action would be a phased transition to a new structure for the Union. This could, for example, involve the establishment of a shadow trustee board.

The report from the SU President was noted.

The meeting was briefly adjourned for a refreshment break.

PART II

6. CHAIR'S COMMENTS AND ANY OTHER BUSINESS MATTERS

6.1 Chair's update

The Chair updated the members on progress to identify a new member with a background in higher education to join the governing body. Proposals were also being developed on the appointment of a new Clerk to the governing body.

6.2 Any other business requests

There were no other business requests.

7. GOVERNANCE AND ASSURANCE MATTERS

7.1 Private session of Council

The Chair reminded members that it had been agreed that if they wished to raise a matter, they should notify the Chair or Clerk ahead of Council. The Chair would consult with members before the 2023 Away Day on whether a further private session of the Council should take place.

7.2 Prevent monitoring report and annual accountability statement

Council received the report confirming the University's compliance with the Prevent duty during 2021-22 and approved the Annual Accountability Statement for submission to OfS.

Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) and Academic Registrar

The Chair signed the Annual Accountability Statement.

7.3 Update on the implementation of the actions arising from the Governance Effectiveness Review

The Deputy Chair updated Council on progress in implementing the actions arising from the Governance Effectiveness Review (GER).

The scheme of delegation was expected to be presented to the spring meeting of the Council.

Chief Operating Officer

All of the agreed actions arising from the GER were expected to be completed by the end of the current academic year.

Council noted the report.

REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

8. REPORT FROM THE PEOPLE COMMITTEE

8.1 Unconfirmed minutes of the meeting held on 14 October 2022

The Chair of the committee introduced the minutes. The meeting had been largely exploratory, identifying topics for the subsequent meetings of the committee during 2022/23.

Council received the unconfirmed minutes of the meeting.

9. REPORT FROM AUDIT COMMITTEE

9.1 Unconfirmed minutes of the meeting held on 31 October 2022

The Chair of the committee introduced the minutes. The committee had considered the actions taken in response to concerns raised about UKVI compliance and Cyber Security. The committee planned to give further consideration to Cyber Security at its spring meeting.

Council received the unconfirmed minutes of the meeting

9.2 United States Department of Education loan programme – review of procedures by KPMG

Council approved the Management Assertions Letter and Management Letter of Representation for the audit of the US Department of Education loan programme.

Chair

9.3 Audit Committee Annual Report

Council received the Audit Committee's Annual Report.

10. REPORT FROM JOINT AUDIT AND FINANCE AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

10.1 Unconfirmed minutes of the meeting held on 31 October 2022

Council received the unconfirmed minutes of the meeting.

10.2 Commentary on the financial statements 2021/22

The commentary on the financial statements 2021/22 was noted.

10.3 KPMG - External Auditors Report 2021/22

The External Auditors had issued a positive opinion and confirmed the University was a going concern. No significant adjustments or matters of control had been identified.

The External Auditors Report 2021/22 was noted.

10.4 Financial Statements for NUA 2021/22

Council's attention was drawn to the requirement that the Chair, on behalf of the Council, would be asked to sign a Letter of Representation.

The Report and Consolidated Financial statements for 2021/22 and the Letter of Representation were approved by Council.

Chair

The Chairs of the Audit and Finance and Resources committee recorded their thanks to the work of the external auditors (who were completing their final audit of the University's financial statements), and the work of the Chief Operating Officer, the Director of Finance and Planning and University Finance team for their work on completing the financial statements.

11. REPORT FROM FINANCE AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

11.1 Unconfirmed minutes of the meeting held on 31 October 2022

The committee had reviewed the Finance Report, including projections for cash flow, capital expenditure and levelling-up funding. The University continued to have a strong financial position.

The Committee had also reviewed and approved an interim update to the Financial Regulations and considered a draft of the new financial strategy.

The VC updated Council on the appointment of a Director of Marketing and Recruitment. The University had received a pleasing number of high-quality applications for the position. Council would receive an update on the appointment at its next meeting.

VC

The University would shortly begin utilising space in Bank Plain during the inter-change week for student projects, and commence tours of the building for staff.

The Council received the unconfirmed minutes of the meeting.

11.2 Finance Report October 2022 – Executive Summary

Council noted the Finance Report.

12. CHAIRMAN'S CLOSING REMARKS

The Chair thanked all participants for their attendance and contributions to the meeting.

13. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

The next regular meeting of the Council would commence at 10.30 on 24 March 2023. Nominations Committee will meet ahead of Council at 09.30.