

UNIVERSITY COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 27 November 2023, from 10:00-14:30 at the West Hub and via Zoom

Present: The Vice-Chancellor (Chair); the Master of Gonville and Caius College, the Master of Fitzwilliam College and the President of Lucy Cavendish College; Professor Davenport, Professor Mortier, Professor Peacock, and Professor Scott-Warren; Dr Adams, Ms Bodfish, Mr Dix, Dr Joy, Mr Mandelbrote, Dr Sewell and Dr van Houten; Mr Carling, Mr Kirman and Mr Pratap; Ms Bagley (Deputy Chair), Ms Flood, Professor Halliday and Professor Wathey; with the Registrary, the Director of Governance and Compliance, the Senior Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Enterprise and Business Relations), the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education), the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Strategy and Planning), the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (University Community and Engagement), the Chief Financial Officer, the Academic Secretary, the Head of the Vice-Chancellor's Office, the Senior Governance Manager and the Council Secretariat Administrator.

The Junior Proctor was present.

Mr Matt Norton, Head of Strategic Communications, attended the meeting in lieu of the Director of Communications.

Mrs Alice Benton, Head of Education Services, attended for item 870 'Student Workload'.

Mr David Hughes, Director of Finance, and Mr Stephen Peacock, Head of Group Financial Reporting, attended for items 876a 'Financial Statements' and 876b 'Annual Financial Return 2022 Workbook and Commentary'.

Professor Richard Penty, attended for item 877 'Review of the Retirement Policy and EJRA'.

Apologies were received from: the Master of St John's College, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and International Partnerships) and the Senior Proctor.

The meeting opened with a minute's silence for Dr Ann Kaminski who had very sadly died after a short illness on 31 October. Dr Kaminski had been a member of the Council since 1 January 2021. She was Head of Scientific Administration at the Cancer Research UK Cambridge Institute and a Fellow of St Edmund's College.

Part 1: Strategic Discussion

868. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest in relation to the strategic discussion that had not yet been included in the Council's register of interests.

869. Updates on Strategic Developments

869.1. Progress Towards Developing a Sustainability Strategy

(Paper Nos. 23.11.27.SD2a and 23.11.27.SD2b)

The Vice-Chancellor reminded the Council that at its last meeting it had approved the recommendations of its Working Group on the implementation of the Topping Report and agreed to propose to the Regent House that a sixth Office of Pro-Vice-Chancellor be created to take responsibility for driving progress on the University's sustainability ambitions. The Vice-Chancellor presented a draft plan for how the various strands of work would be taken forward and brought together, including a proposal for a wider strategy in this area.

The first strand was the "development of an institutional academic strategy on climate and sustainability". The Council noted that the Research Policy Committee had established a group to lead on the elements of that strategy which related to research

into climate and environmental sustainability. Members proposed that this strand should be complemented by a further piece of work that would focus on education and would report to the General Board's Education Committee.

With regard to the second strand, "development of a clear framework for assessing the acceptability of fossil fuel funding", the Chair reported that CBELA would discuss initial ideas for a revised process to review potential collaborations with, and funding from, fossil fuel companies at its next meeting and would have further in-depth discussions in early March, with a view to agreeing a proposal in April.

The third strand "establishment of a plan for meeting ISO 20400 standards for sustainable procurement" was also underway. The Procurement team had an existing commitment to acquire external assessment of the ISO 20 400 sustainable procurement standard and the University had signed up to a carbon supplier tool as part of Cambridge's collaboration with other universities on sustainable procurement. This exercise would begin with the University's strategic suppliers, which were managed by the central Procurement team.

The "Collegiate University-wide consultation" which formed the fourth strand would begin this term with a meeting of the Heads of Institutions. Two further meetings for academic staff, professional services staff, and students would follow in early Lent Term, details of which would be announced in the *Reporter* and provided by other means. Members noted that comments from these meetings would be fed back to those working on the recommendations and particularly emphasise the importance of communicating effectively with students.

Members noted that the fifth strand, "creation of an additional office of Pro-Vice-Chancellor with responsibility for sustainability" had been the subject of a Discussion. At that Discussion, and the subsequent meeting of the Business Committee, different views had been expressed about the breadth of the remit of the new office; the Committee had consequently referred the draft Notice and Grace for consideration by the full Council. It was suggested that the Notice should be amended to include reference to the UN Sustainable Development Goals to provide a clearer definition of the broader understanding of the term 'sustainability'.

The Council discussed the proposal for the development of a comprehensive institutional strategy on climate and environmental sustainability, which would cover the University's academic and operational activities. The Council endorsed the suggestion that the draft Strategic Framework for Sustainability, in particular those aspects which aligned with the recommendations of the Working Group on the Topping Study, should be used as a foundation for this strategy.

As with the remit of the proposed additional office of Pro-Vice-Chancellor, the Council noted that the initial focus of the strategy would be on climate and environmental sustainability, as these were the most urgent and pressing areas of need. However, subject to progress, there would be scope to broaden it in the future to cover the full range of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The Council **noted** the intention to discuss progress towards this strategy at the Strategic Awayday in March 2024 and commented that it would be helpful to define a long-term unifying goal for the strategy and some key performance indicators.

The Council **delegated authority** to its Business Committee to approve the amended Notice.

869.2. Pro-Vice-Chancellor Portfolios (Paper No. 23.11.27.SD2b)

The Chair reported that the Nominating Committee for the Office of Pro-Vice-Chancellor would meet shortly to shortlist for the office of Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Innovation) and to consider timetables for the forthcoming searches for the successors to Professors Cardwell and Ferguson-Smith, as well as for the proposed

new office which would have responsibility for sustainability, subject to the approval of the Regent House.

The Chair noted that the working title for the new portfolio was Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Climate and Environmental Sustainability) and that, in line with the plan discussed in the previous item, it was proposed that the initial focus of the role should be on climate and environmental sustainability but that, over time and depending on progress, there would be scope to broaden it to other areas of sustainability (as indicated in minute 869.1 above).

The Council shared initial ideas for the remits of the three portfolios for consideration by the Nominating Committee. Members commented on the heavy workload associated with these broad portfolios and suggested that thought be given to creating deputies and/or providing more support to Pro-Vice-Chancellors at the start of their terms.

The Council **noted** that it would receive draft Notices for the three portfolios at its next meeting, together with a paper considering whether and if so how, recruitment to Pro-Vice-Chancellorships could be opened to external candidates.

869.3. Development of the People Strategy

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (University Community and Engagement) presented an update on the development of the People Strategy. The presentation outlined the challenges relating to recruitment, retention and cost of living pressures. It gave an overview of the ideas within the developing strategy for addressing these challenges, as well as for improving talent management, enhancing the culture and community of the University and improving organisational effectiveness. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor also presented some insights from the recent pay review.

Members commented on the scale of the challenge and noted that prioritising, phasing and resourcing the various elements would be critical to the success of the strategy.

The Council **noted** the update and that there would be a more in-depth discussion about the development of the Strategy at the Strategic Awayday in March 2024.

870. Student Workload (Paper No. 23.11.27.SD3)

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) reminded the Council that in response to proposals driven by Cambridge SU for the introduction of a reading week, it had asked that broader consideration be given to ways of reducing student workload. He reported that the General Board had approved the terms of reference for a Student Workload Task and Finish Group, which would encourage and support Faculties and Departments to undertake their own reviews of student workload and develop institution-wide changes to address excessive student workload. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor noted that consideration would be given to options in the short, medium and longer term to ensure that workload issues could start to be addressed quickly, while recognising that addressing any institutional culture of overwork would require more significant changes.

The Council's discussion focussed on potential institution-wide changes to address excessive student workload. In breakout groups members discussed: the potential cultural and systemic drivers leading to overwork among the student body and how these could be addressed; the potential administrative or organisational issues which add to student or staff workload and how these could be addressed; and what institution-wide changes could be made to reduce the incidence of overwork and to encourage periods of rest.

The Council **noted** the terms of reference for the Student Workload Task and Finish Group and **agreed** that its suggestions and comments would be relayed to the Group

for consideration. The Council also **noted** that it would discuss the findings and recommendations of the Task and Finish Group in the Easter Term.

Part 2: Ordinary Business

UNRESERVED BUSINESS

A. Preliminary Matters

871. Declarations of Interest

The following members of the Council were conflicted with item 875b 'UCEA Consultation on Exploring Multi-Year Pay Deals from 2024-25' and did not participate in the decision: the Vice-Chancellor; the Master of Gonville and Caius College; Professors Davenport, Mortier, Peacock and Scott-Warren; Ms Bodfish; and Dr van Houten.

872. Minutes (Paper No. 23.11.27.A2)

The Council **approved** the minutes of the meeting that was held on 16 September October 2023.

873. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising that were not discussed elsewhere on the agenda.

874. Report by the Vice-Chancellor

The Council **agreed** to receive the Vice-Chancellor's report by circulation after the meeting. This report noted that the University's Commissary, the Rt Hon the Lord Igor Judge, had sadly died on 7 November 2023. Arrangements were being made for the Chancellor to appoint an Acting Commissary.

The Vice-Chancellor's report also noted that the Autumn Budget had included £2m to address water scarcity in Cambridge and £3m to support the Cambridge Delivery Group drive the long-term vision for Cambridge by exploring the case for a development corporation. In addition, the government had accepted the recommendations of an independent report by Professor Irene Tracey, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford, and Dr Andrew Williamson, from Cambridge Innovation Capital, to help improve the creation and growth of university spin-out companies.

Finally, the Vice-Chancellor's report noted that the funding bodies were undertaking a consultation on the proposals for the People, Culture and Environment element of the submission for REF28. The University's draft response would be approved by the Research Policy Committee and the final version would be included in a Council circular for information.

B. Principal Business

875. Update on Industrial Action, Pay Negotiations and the USS

875.1. Consultation on the USS Schedule of Contributions Arising From the 2023 Valuation (Paper No. 23.11.27.B1a)

The Council noted that, following the completion of the consultation on the proposed funding assumptions and methodology for the 2023 valuation of USS (the Technical Provisions consultation) the USS Trustee was consulting with UUK on the Trustee's proposed Schedule of Contributions (SOC). UUK had asked the scheme's

participating employers for their views on the proposed SOC to enable it to provide a response to USS by 4 December 2023.

The Council **agreed** to receive the consultation response by circulation after the meeting for information. In line with the University's responses to previous USS consultations, this draft confirmed to UUK that the University agreed with the USS proposals to reduce the required contribution rate with effect from 1 January 2024.

875.2. UCEA Consultation on Exploring Multi-Year Pay Deals from 2024-25 (Paper No. 23.11.27.B1b)

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (University Community and Engagement) reported that as part of considering its strategy for the 2024-25 New Joint Negotiating Committee for Higher Education Staff (JNCHES) pay negotiations, and before the start of the formal consultation process, UCEA had asked employers whether they would support UCEA exploring the option of a multi-year pay deal.

He proposed that the University should indicate that it supported in principle UCEA exploring a multi-year deal tagged to inflation (preferably with safeguards in place that cap the upward exposure), as this might help to provide financial and industrial relations stability.

It was **agreed** that the unconflicted members of the Council would make their decision by circulation after the meeting.¹

875.3. Update on Industrial Action

The Council **agreed** to receive the update by circulation after the meeting.

The update noted that UCU had not secured a mandate for either strike action or action short of strike in respect of the New JNCHES 2023-24 pay dispute. However, Unite had secured a mandate for industrial action at the University following a local ballot of members. The dispute related to a demand for an above-inflation pay rise to address Cambridge's higher cost of living. In addition, the update noted that UNISON planned to launch a re-ballot to extend their current and recently expired mandates for strike action over the 2023-24 pay dispute.

The update noted that all trade unions had been urged to work with UCEA in prioritising the independent review of sector finances and to work together to end the recent cycle of industrial disputes.

876. End of Year Documentation

876.1. Financial Statements (Paper No. 23.11.27.B2a)

The Director of Finance introduced the Reports and Financial Statements, together with the Letter of Representation and the External Auditor's Report to the Audit Committee. He reported that PwC had issued an unqualified opinion and that the Finance and Audit Committees had recommended the Reports and Financial Statements to the Council for approval, subject to various late adjustments. A number of adjustments had since been agreed under delegated authority from the Finance and Audit Committees, and had been included in the versions presented to the Council. A couple of further minor adjustments were outstanding, which would be made prior to submission of the Reports and Financial Statements to the Office for Students (OfS). The Director of Finance advised that these adjustments were not material.

¹ The unconflicted members of the Council **approved** the consultation response by circulation on the afternoon of 27 November.

The Council:

- i. **reviewed** and **approved** the Reports and Financial Statements as presented for the year ended 31 July 2023;
- ii. **gave approval** for the Financial Statements to be signed as presented;
- iii. **delegated authority** to the Vice-Chancellor, the Deputy Chair of the Council and the Chief Financial Officer to sign the Financial Statements on behalf of the Council;
- iv. **reviewed** the Letter of Representation and **gave approval** for the Letter as presented to be signed by the Vice-Chancellor, the Chair of the Audit Committee and the Chief Financial Officer; and
- v. **noted** the External Auditor's Report to the Audit Committee.

876.2. Annual Financial Return 2022 Workbook and Commentary

(Paper No. 23.11.27.B2b)

The Director of Finance presented the Annual Financial Return (AFR) workbook and associated commentary, which the University was required to submit to the OfS for the financial year ended 31 July 2023. He noted that during December the AFR would be subjected to a data verification exercise run by the OfS, as well as further internal review prior to submission of final workbook and commentary by 8 January 2024.

Members suggested some modifications to the commentary to reflect the uncertainty of the financial climate.

The Council:

- i. **approved** the initial Return and commentary, subject to the modifications which it had suggested;
- ii. **delegated authority** to the Director of Finance to issue the return; and
- iii. **delegated authority** to the Vice-Chancellor to sign-off the final submission.

876.3. Reports of the Audit Committee and the Internal Auditors

(Paper Nos. 23.11.27.B2ci and 23.11.27.B2cii)

The Chair of the Audit Committee introduced the Committee's Annual Report for 2022-23, plus a supplementary report for the Council on the challenges that it had discussed during 2022-23 and the work which was required to strengthen the University's internal controls.

These challenges related to the tension between institutional autonomy within the University's devolved structure and the need for the University to demonstrate that it had appropriate mechanisms in place to comply with regulatory requirements and to manage its risks effectively. The Council accepted these findings and agreed with the Committee that work needed to be undertaken to strengthen the University's internal controls.

The Council noted the Internal Auditor's opinion, which provided reasonable assurance that the University had an efficient and effective system of risk management and governance. The Chair of the Audit Committee reported that the Committee would monitor the implementation of action plans which had been agreed to reinforce and improve internal controls in respect of: IT infrastructure; research funder requirements; aspects of estates; and health and safety risks. He noted that the Audit Committee would continue to escalate concerns to the Council as necessary.

The Council **discussed** the risks highlighted by the Audit Committee and **noted** the Audit Committee's Annual Report, including the Internal Auditor's Annual Report.

876.4. Annual Report of the Remuneration Committee (Paper No. 23.11.27.B2d)

The Chair of the Remuneration Committee introduced the Report for 2022-23. The Report was based on guidance provided by the Committee of University Chairs and the OfS; it aimed to provide assurance to the Council that the Committee had discharged its responsibilities.

Members suggested that the Remuneration Committee should explore whether existing data would enable the University to better understand the ratio between pay increases at the highest grades compared to those for staff as a whole.

The Council **approved** the Report for publication.

876.5. Prevent Accountability and Data Return (Paper No. 23.11.27.B2e)

The Senior Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Enterprise and Business Relations) introduced the University's Prevent accountability and data return to the OfS for the 2022-23 financial year.

The Council:

- i. **approved** the signature of the Prevent annual accountability declaration and its submission to the OfS; and
- ii. **approved** the data return for submission to the OfS.

C. Other Matters

877. Indicative Timetable for the Review of the Retirement Policy and EJRA (Paper No. 23.11.27.C1)

The Chair of the Retirement Policy and EJRA Review Group presented an update on the work of the Review Group and noted that this included gathering evidence to determine what impact there might be if the EJRA were to be removed or raised.

He reported that the Review Group had been working to an indicative timetable with the expectation that the Council could publish any proposals for change in time for implementation from 1 October 2024, with transitional arrangements made for those currently due to retire in September 2024. However, due to significant issues with receiving critical data from an external source it had become necessary to review this timeline.

The Chair of the Review Group reported that the Group had considered two options. The first of these options would still enable any changes to be implemented in time for the September 2024 cohort of retiring staff, whereas the second would result in a ballot in Michaelmas Term 2024.

The Council **approved** the first option for the revised indicative timetable, noting that this was the Review Group's recommended option since it would end the uncertainty for departments and staff earlier. The Council also **approved** the related Notice for publication.

RESERVED BUSINESS

878. Proposals of the Honorary Degree Committee (Paper No. 23.11.27.R1)

The Council approved each of the Committee's proposed candidates, with a view to the Vice-Chancellor issuing a confidential and conditional invitation to each of the candidates for admission to an Honorary Doctorate in person.

879. Vice-Chancellor's Objectives for 2023-24

The Deputy Chair took the Chair for this item.

The Council **noted** that the Vice-Chancellor was content with the objectives for 2023-24, as previously approved by the Council in June 2023.

Part 3: Starred Items

880. Review of Governance for Examinations (Paper No. 23.11.27.SI1)

The Council noted that a Task and Finish Group had been convened to conduct a review of the University's examination regulations in light of the lessons learned during the marking and assessment boycott in 2023.

The Council **noted** the Group's recommendations that Phase 1 of the review would consider interim measures that should be available in the event of major disruption to examinations, pending a more in-depth review of examination governance in Phase 2.

The Council **agreed** that the Business Committee could receive the Report for approval.

881. Revised Procedure for the Investigation of an Allegation of Research Misconduct (Paper No. 23.11.27.SI2)

The Council **approved** the revised procedure for the Investigation of an Allegation of Research Misconduct and **approved** the associated Report for publication.

882. Update on the Casual Workforce Review Project (Paper No. 23.11.27.SI3)

The Council **noted** the update on the Casual Workforce Review Project.

883. Minor Updates to the University-wide Conflict of Interest Policy
(Paper No. 23.11.27.SI4)

The Council **approved** a number of minor amendments to the University-wide Conflict of Interest Policy.

884. Information Services Acceptable Use Policy (Paper No. 23.11.27.SI5)

The Council **approved** the Information Services Acceptable Use Policy.

885. End of Year Documentation

885.1. Annual Report of the Council (Paper No. 23.11.27.SI6a)

The Council **approved** and **agreed** to sign for publication its Annual Report for 2022-23.

885.2. Annual Report of the General Board (Paper No. 23.11.27.SI6b)

The Council **noted** the Annual Report of the General Board for 2022-23.

885.3. Annual Research Integrity Report (Paper No. 23.11.27.SI6c)

The Council **approved** the Annual Research Integrity Report for 2022-23 for publication and **noted** the Annual Research Integrity Assurance Table.

886. Council Circulars

Council circulars had been issued and approved as follows:

[24/23](#) issued on 10 November and approved on 20 November 2023

[23/23](#) issued on 27 October and approved on 6 November 2023

[22/23](#) issued on 13 October and approved on 23 October 2023