

COUNCIL

MINUTES

Minutes of the 237th meeting of Council held on **Wednesday, 3 July 2024** at 2.00pm in ESGW402, Eastern Gateway Building

- Present:** Professor Stuart Palmer (SP), Chair
Ms Amanda Rowlatt CBE (AR), Deputy Chair
Ms Sharon Blackman OBE (SB)
Ms Janet Dean (JD)
Professor Dave Delpy (DD)
Mr Mark Garrett (MG)
Professor Paul Hellewell (PH)
Professor Andrew Jones (AJ), Vice-Chancellor & President
Mr David Kennedy (DK)
Ms Josie Mangan (JM)
Mr Shashank Manjunatha (SM)
Mr Chris Maw (CM)
Ms Tone Rosingholm (TR)
Dr Peter Thomas (PT)
Professor Claire Turner (CT)
Professor Jonathan Wastling (JW)
- Observing:** Ms Roshana Gammampila (RG)
Dr Wael Hadid (WH)
Mr Vishal Parihar (VP)
Mr Chris Stock (CS)
Mr Deepak Yadav (DY)
- In attendance:** Dr Manuel Alonso (MA), Chief Operating Officer
Ms Gemma Bailey (GB), Director of HR
Mr Craig Lithgow (CG), Chief Executive, Union of Brunel Students – *for item 24/83*
Ms Maddie McGowan (MM), Director of Marketing, Communications and Recruitment
Ms Anne Nathan (AN), Chief Finance Officer
Prof Geoff Rodgers (GR), Pro Vice Chancellor, Enterprise and Employment
Dr Nicola Rogers (NR), Chief of Staff
Dr Rosa Scoble (RS), Director of Strategic Planning
Ms Lucy Shirodkar (LS), Chief Digital Information Officer, *for item 24/89*
Mr Jeremy Tanner (JT), Executive Director of Campus Services, *for item 24/88*
- Officers:** Mr Tristan Foot (TF), University Secretary and General Counsel
Ms Helen Dalrymple (HD), Associate Director of Governance - *minutes*
- Apologies:** Mr Mukhtar Ahmed (MA)
Dr Rita Gardner CBE (RG)

Ms Lucinda Hunt (LH)
Mr Suraj Shaw (SS)
Ms Anne Waltham (AW)

STANDING ITEMS

23/78 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

- 78/01** SP welcomed everyone to the meeting, particularly the observers, most of whom would be joining Council as members on 1 August.
- 78/02** Warm thanks were extended to JM, PT and PH, as it was their last Council meeting. Their input had been invaluable. It was also the last meeting for the current student members of Council who were also thanked wholeheartedly.
- 78/03** Apologies had been received from MA, RG, LH, SS and AW.
- 78/04** Members were reminded of the need to keep discussion within the meeting confidential, particularly in challenging times. The volume of papers was remarked upon and feedback would be welcomed on whether any papers had been included that were not necessary.

23/79 DECLARATION OF INTEREST(S)

- 79/01** **NOTED:** that there were no declarations of interest.

23/80 MINUTES OF THE 235th and 236th MEETINGS OF COUNCIL (CO/4022 AND CO/4023)

- 80/01** **APPROVED:** the minutes of the 235th meeting of Council held on 13 March 2024, with a minor amendment at 58/03 and the minutes of the 236th meeting of Council held on the 26 April 2024.

23/81 ACTIONS AND MATTERS ARISING (CO/4024)

- 81/01** **NOTED:** the actions and matters arising since the last meeting. All items were in hand or complete.

23/82 REPORT ON BUSINESS DISCUSSED AT STANDING COMMITTEES (CO/4025)

- 82/01** **NOTED:** the update on business conducted by the standing committees since its last meeting.
- 82/02** The Remuneration Committee had met the previous day and made some adjustments to its Annual Report that had been included in the papers.

82/03 The Finance Committee had also met since dispatch, CM reported that the papers for the meeting had been good quality and members had received a thorough presentation from CL on the Union of Brunel Students (UBS).

82/04 DK, as Chair of Audit and Risk, said that the Committee had concerns on the rates of completed compliance training and had asked for a more comprehensive report to come to its next meeting. It was clear that the Senior Leadership Team agreed that this was an issue and were already working to improve matters.

23/83 CHAIR'S BUSINESS

83/01 **NOTED:** Several Chair's actions that had taken place since the last meeting. These related to updates to various Council Ordinances and the Honorary Degrees procedure. All had been published on the University website.

STRATEGIC PROGRESS AND PERFORMANCE

23/84 VICE-CHANCELLOR'S REPORT (CO/4026)

84/01 **NOTED:** a high-level update and overview of a few key areas of importance since the last report in March 2024.

84/02 AJ said that the University was performing better in some league tables. Although league table optimisation was not an exact science, Brunel was identifying areas to improve that would assist and this activity was to continue to develop. The NSS results were expected the week after the meeting and it was hoped that Brunel would continue its upward trend of performance in this particular survey.

CL joined the meeting

23/85 REPORT FROM UNION OF BRUNEL STUDENTS (CO/4027)

85/01 **NOTED:** a report to ensure that Council had effective oversight of the Union and its finances.

85/02 Council asked what steps it could take to assist UBS in its endeavours. The Union would require support in trying to get people involved in its work earlier, at a grassroots level to improve participation in elections. This could be achieved by establishing a system of class representatives, encouraging an atmosphere of getting involved amongst students which would lead to a more engaged populace with better representation as a result.

85/04 The current student assembly was clearly weighted towards a certain demographic, with some groups underrepresented, this was an area that

required improvement. It was to be proposed that certain roles in the assembly be ring-fenced for underrepresented demographics.

- 85/05** The budget that would be given to UBS by the University had not yet been approved; negotiations were underway and a final decision would be made the following week. UBS understood the financial position of the University and had aligned its expectations. Council said that it understood that the Union was an important part of the student experience.

CL left the meeting

23/86 FINANCIAL POSITION (CO/4028)

- 86/01** **NOTED:** An update on the financial position of the University.
- 86/02** In common with the sector, the financial pressures caused by a decline in international applicants was being felt at Brunel. There were a number of factors for this, the main ones being geo-political and largely outside of Brunel's control
- 86/03** Members understood that it was difficult to reduce costs, it was hoped that this could be achieved by making best use of its real estate and operating more efficiently. They advised caution in cutting costs which could sometimes have significant, unintended consequences and lead to a downward spiral from which it may be more difficult to recover.
- 86/04** The current narrative was not that of a quick fix, but of taking a couple of years to invest carefully and apply efficiencies thoughtfully. At this point there were still plenty of options.

23/87 2024/25 BUDGET (CO/4029)

- 87/01** **APPROVED:** An interim budget for 2024/25
- 87/02** Final student recruitment numbers would not be known until the autumn; this draft of the budget anticipated efficiency savings of about £14M. A sector pay deal had been proposed by UCEA. If agreed by the unions, this could be delayed by up to 11 months if necessary, however the associated negative impact on staff and morale would have to be considered carefully.
- 87/03** The senior leadership team were on a pay freeze for 2024/25, delaying the pay agreement for other staff would be a last resort. Other universities were going ahead with pay deals, which could mean Brunel losing staff to them.
- 87/04** Declaring an interest as a member of staff, PT asked whether this budget would be sustainable in the longer term; undergraduate recruitment numbers were also challenging. Recruitment for the Medical School was looking positive; however, its course costs were higher.

- 87/05** There was some discussion on the volatility of student recruitment; overall numbers were currently down, though there was a strong pipeline with the potential to convert. The recruitment team were cautiously optimistic at this point.
- 87/06** The hope for better numbers was based on data; the biggest risk was the postgraduate numbers would continue to decline. The 2024/25 Budget had assumed a 12% drop in undergraduate student numbers, the cost base was solid.
- 87/07** Members asked what assurance there was around realising efficiencies. They heard that an efficiency board had been established to restructure the University and define a Target Operating Model (TOM).
- 87/08** Non-pay costs had been reduced as much as possible, changes to staffing structures would be looked at very carefully to avoid disproportionate consequences. The TOM would be on the agenda of the October Council meeting.
- 87/09** Council asked whether any more CAPEX could be paused; this had already been done and spend had been re-prioritised several times. Some was essential and would have to be spent this year.
- 87/10** There was a combination of uncertainty on income and on delivering savings and how much they might cost, more clarity was needed and this would be available in October.
- 87/11** Regarding the medium-term forecast, Council asked for an update on the rebalance of student/staff; the strategy was just getting into the detail of this, with the imminent General Election it would be important for Brunel to respond to its environment. There was also a January intake of students which may be better if political events allowed.

23/88 NEW ACADEMIC STRUCTURES (CO/4030)

- 88/01** **NOTED:** Proposed changes to the academic leadership structures in the Colleges, changes to existing College and Department structures and the creation of four College entities.
- 88/02** Council were supportive of the changes, they asked if the Senior Team's workload could bear the extra demands and heard that the support of the Executive Deans had been crucial and that they had been understanding. HR were also very involved.
- 88/03** Members asked whether the proposals would allow for growth and the future. By separating the Business School, it would have a different identity and could grow. The Colleges would be more balanced in terms of size. More focus would be placed on NHS and Business Futures.
- 88/04** Council were told that different areas could be managed and were of similar sizes, as the process went along it would be adapted if necessary on a case

by case basis, Council would be kept updated and feedback would be welcomed.

23/89 KPI PROGRESS AND UNDERPINNING ACTIONS UPDATE (CO/4031)

- 89/01** **NOTED:** The progress of actions against institutional KPIs and delivery plans.
- 89/02** Most were progressing well and where this wasn't the case, this was acknowledged and explained, in some cases the data was not yet available.
- 89/03** Members suggested the addition of a RAG rating to the table; this wouldn't work where incomplete but would be added to the table and to the timeline where appropriate. **ACTION: JW**

JT joined the meeting

23/90 ESTATES STRATEGY – CAMPUS MASTERPLAN (CO/4032)

- 90/01** **NOTED:** an update on planned RAAC mitigations for CDEPS teaching in Autumn 2024.

APPROVED: Delegation of authority for approval of a gateway three decision to the Estates sub-Committee AND a draft Campus Masterplan.
- 90/02** Urgent and necessary spend was required to replace RAAC-effected buildings in the College of Engineering, Design and Physical Sciences (CDEPS). The Estates sub-Committee would be convened to review and approve the spend and CM as chair of the Finance Committee would be invited to attend. **ACTION: TF.**
- 90/03** Council acknowledged the frustration of having to pause some projects due to finances and said that it would welcome regular updates on progress. Members thanked staff for their work in challenging circumstances.

JT left the meeting and LS joined the meeting.

23/91 DIGITAL STRATEGY (CO/4033)

RESERVED ADDITIONAL ITEM

- 91/01** Members welcomed LS to her first Council meeting. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
- [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- 91/03** **APPROVED:** Phase I of the Digital Strategy, subject to the inclusion of a Governance Plan.
- 91/04** Council were pleased with the timescales set out in the strategy and heard that a road map should be in place by September. It would be essential to have good digital capability for the work on the TOM.
- 91/05** Members asked whether existing finance systems would be replaced; this would be reviewed in due course. The priority for year one was discovery work.
- 91/06** Council asked for assurance on what the governance was around implementation of the strategy, which was very complex and reached across many areas of the organisation. It would like to see a further section added to the strategy clearly setting out the governance structure.
ACTION: MA
- 91/07** Members discussed the flow of reporting on the strategy to Council; they agreed that both the Audit and Risk Committee and the Finance Committee should receive annual reports on this area, as well as regular updates.
- 91/08** Council should have robust oversight and assurance on the Digital Strategy, expectations had to be managed in terms of its resourcing and success.
- 91/09** Members asked for clarity on how cybersecurity was being maintained; this was a complex area, with effective monitoring tools in place from JISC and network authorisation processes with both CISCO and Microsoft.

OPERATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

23/92 ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION PLAN (CO/4034)

- 92/01** **NOTED:** Brunel's 2025-2029 Access and Participation Plan as submitted to the OfS.
- 92/02** No response had been received from the OfS at this point, the focus of the Plan had pivoted from bursary support to investment in the success and progression stages of the student lifecycle.

23/93 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HONORARY AWARDS (CO/4035)

- 93/01** **APPROVED:** Recommendations for Honorary Awards.

23/94 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TUITION FEES 2025/26 (CO/4036)

94/01 APPROVED: The fees table for the 2025/26 academic year and confirmed the EU fees discounts.

GOVERNANCE ASSURANCE

23/95 REPORT ON RISK MANAGEMENT (CO/4037)

95/01 NOTED: An interim update on changes to institutional level risks and an aggregated view of operational risks.

23/96 ANNUAL REPORT ON OFS COMPLIANCE (4038)

96/01 NOTED: An annual overview of OfS compliance.

GOVERNANCE EFFECTIVENESS

23/97 CAPABILITY POLICY (CO/4039)

97/01 APPROVED: The updated Capability policy and procedure.

23/98 GOVERNANCE EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW (CO/4040)

98/01 NOTED: An update on the selection of a provider for the Governance Effectiveness review.

23/99 MEMBERSHIP OF THE BOARD AND STANDING COMMITTEES FOR THE FOLLOWING ACADEMIC YEAR (CO/4041)

99/01 NOTED: The current membership of Council and of standing committees for the following academic year.

RECURRENT ITEMS (FOR INFORMATION)

23/100 SCHEDULE OF BUSINESS (CO/4042)

100/01 NOTED: The schedule of business for Council.

23/101 UNCONFIRMED MINUTES OF COUNCIL COMMITTEES (CO/4043 TO CO/4045)

101/01 NOTED: Finance Committee minutes 21 March 2024

101/02 NOTED: Governance and Nominations Committee minutes 10 June 2024

101/03 NOTED: Audit and Risk Committee minutes 6 June 2024

23/102 ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE ETHICS ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CO/4046)

102/01 NOTED: An annual summary of business of the Ethics Advisory Committee

23/103 ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE REMUNERATION COMMITTEE (CO/4047)

103/01 NOTED: A report from the Remuneration Committee outlining the Committee's role, remit, membership, activities throughout the year and how it filled its responsibilities. The report would form part of the University's end of year financial statement.

23/104 REPORT ON BUSINESS DISCUSSED AT SENATE (CO/4048)

104/01 NOTED: A report to Council on matters arising from the meetings of Senate held on the 7 February and 10 April 2024.

23/105 MEDIA COVERAGE (CO/4049)

105/01 NOTED: Media coverage of Brunel since the last meeting.

23/106 STAFF APPOINTMENTS, RESIGNATIONS AND LEAVE OF ABSENCES (CO/4050)

106/01 NOTED: All academic, post-doctoral and senior professional appointments, retirements, resignations and fixed term contract terminations since the last report dated 4 March 2024 and permanent academic employees taking leave of absence.

23/107 SEALING OF DOCUMENTS

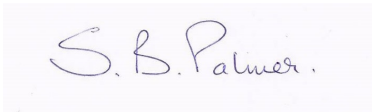
107/01 NOTED: The register of sealed documents.

23/108 ANY OTHER BUSINESS AND FEEDBACK ON THE CURRENT MEETING

- 108/01** Members were asked to provide feedback via email on the papers for this meeting.
- 108/02** There being no further business to discuss, the meeting was ended at 5:15pm

DATE OF NEXT MEETING – 2 October 2024

Meeting Minutes Approved:



Professor Stuart Palmer, Chairperson

2 October 2024

Date