COUNCIL

CONFIRMED MINUTES

Minutes of the 244th meeting of Council held on **Wednesday 9 July 2025** in Room ESGW402, Eastern Gateway Building and on Microsoft Teams.

Present:
Professor Stuart Palmer (SP), Chair, *independent member*
Ms Amanda Rowlatt (AR), Deputy Chair, *independent member*
Dr Vineta Bhalla (VB), *independent member*
Ms Sharon Blackman (SB), *independent member*
Ms Janet Dean (JD), *independent member*
Professor Dave Delpy (DD), *independent member*
Ms Lucinda Hunt (LH), *independent member*
Professor Andrew Jones (AJ), Vice-Chancellor & President, *ex-officio*
Mr David Kennedy (DK), *independent member*
Mr Rana Naumann (RN), *student representative*
Mr Iwan Parry (IP), *student representative*
Mr Chris Stock (CS), *elected staff member*
Professor Claire Turner (CT), *senior staff member*
Professor Jonathan Wastling (JW), *senior staff member*
Dr Allison Wiseman (AW), *elected staff member*

Observers:
Mr Abhishek Ghawate (AG), *Education President, Union of Brunel Students*
Mr Nafee Khan (NK), *Student Activities President, Union of Brunel Students*

In attendance:
Mr Craig Lithgow (CL), Chief Executive of the Union of Brunel Students – for item 24/98
Ms Gemma Bailey (GB), Chief People and Culture Officer
Ms Anne Nathan (AN), Chief Finance Officer
Dr Nicola Rogers (NR), Chief of Staff
Dr Rosa Scoble (RS), Director of Strategic Planning

Officers:
Mr Tristan Foot (TF), University Secretary and General Counsel
Ms Helen Dalrymple (HD), Associate Director of Governance - *minutes*

Apologies:
Mr Mark Garrett (MG), *independent member*
Mr Chris Maw (CM), *independent member*
Ms Tone Rosingholm (TR), *independent member*
Ms Anne Waltham (AW), *independent member*

STANDING ITEMS

24/90 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

90/01 The Chair welcomed everybody to the meeting. Apologies had been received from MG, CM, TR and AW.

90/02 The agenda for this meeting was long, timings had been added to the agenda to give an indication of how much time was allocated to each item.

90/03 This would be the last Council meeting for RN and IP, they were thanked for their contributions this year. This would also be the last meeting for AR and GB; they were warmly thanked and all were given best wishes for the future.

90/04 The student Council members for next year, AG and NK, were present as observers; The Chair reminded all present of the confidential nature of some of the matters that would be discussed.

24/91 DECLARATION OF INTEREST(S)

91/01 **NOTED:** that there were no declarations of interest.

24/92 COUNCIL MINUTES (CO/4115, CO/4116)

92/01 **APPROVED:** The minutes of Council meetings held on the 19 March and the 20 May 2025, subject to the corrections suggested below.

92/02 There was a duplication of the word ‘hundred’ in the minutes from the meeting on the 19 March which would be corrected. **ACTION: HD**

24/93 ACTIONS AND MATTERS ARISING (CO/4117)

93/01 **NOTED:** The action summary sheet from the last full meeting in March. All actions were complete.

93/02 *Action reference 69/10 from the meeting on the 19 March:* This action was now complete; an update on the Council Away Day had been provided.

93/03 A clarification was provided on the 13-week cash flow, which was updated monthly. Members agreed that the note from the Financial Planning sub-group, which met every two weeks and was then circulated to Council, was enough information for now.

93/04 There was some discussion on how to assure Council that the University was working with the OfS; members said that they would like to be informed if there was any deterioration in the relationship.

93/05 The Governance and Nominations Committee had agreed that it would consider adding the monitoring of strategy to its terms of reference. AR,

Chair of that Committee, had made several suggestions that would be taken to its next meeting in September.

93/06 Under matters arising, the Council noted that a proposal for the reduction of some tuition fees for 2025/26 had been approved by email on 31 March, with no objections from members.

24/94 REPORT OF BUSINESS DISCUSSED AT STANDING COMMITTEES (CO/4118)

94/01 **APPROVED:** That Sabbatical Officers of the Union of Brunel Students would serve as members on Council

94/02 **APPROVED:** Amendments to Council Ordinances 2, 4, 6 and 9 and the deletion of Ordinance 8.

94/03 **APPROVED:** Honorary Awards

94/04 **APPROVED:** The sale of 9 Church Road

94/05 The Remuneration Committee had met that morning and its Chair gave an update, the Committee's annual report had been approved. It had been noted that pay awards would continue to be deferred; this was challenging but necessary.

94/06 The Governance and Nominations Committee and the Finance Committee had both made recommendations to Council for approval.

94/07 Fluctuations in the University's finances meant that the Finance Committee was meeting more frequently, with extra meetings scheduled during the summer.

94/08 The Audit and Risk Committee had received updates on compliance and the risk register, which was becoming more sensitive. There had been some changes to personnel on the external audit team who had attended the meeting in person.

24/95 ELECTION OF THE DEPUTY CHAIR

95/01 Both candidates for the role of Deputy Chair made representations to their colleagues. Votes were then made in a secret ballot, to be counted in the break.

STRATEGIC PROGRESS AND PERFORMANCE

24/96 VICE CHANCELLOR AND PRESIDENT'S REPORT (CO/4119)

96/01 **NOTED:** A high-level update and overview of some key areas of importance since the last report in March 2025.

96/02 Thanks were expressed to GB, who was leaving the University later that month. She had assumed a gargantuan role at Brunel and would be sorely missed. Other colleagues, the Director of Facilities and Commercial Services and the Director of Estates, had also left after many years of valued service.

96/03 Support would be required from the government throughout the HE sector; there was a significant amount of pain in rapid change which the government seemed a little closer to understanding.

96/04 Brunel had responded well to current challenges in comparison to some other universities and would continue to adhere to its strategy, now a full member of the University of London.

96/05 The University had risen to 67th in the Complete University Guide league table, this was due in part to having good systems in place and put Brunel in the middle rankings.

96/06 Performance had not been as strong in the QS World University Rankings, Citation per Faculty (CpF) had not increased in line with other institutions. Research was crucial, the launch of the ResearchPlus collaborative in June, of which Brunel was a founding partner, aimed to strengthen the UK's research and innovation base.

96/07 Members asked whether the dip in the CpF was connected to academics leaving the University, or whether it had any connection to the unions' call to boycott or grey list Brunel in response to job cuts; this was not the case, relations with the unions were cordial, staff had been carrying out their roles and working hard. At this point the PDR process was not operational, which needed to be resolved, there was also a requirement for leadership and management training.

96/08 With Academic Re-sizing 2 imminent, some academics would be out of scope for redundancy if they had research income, it was important to get this right and emphasise the important of contributing to the University via research reputation if possible. Research income was currently up 19% on the same period last year, while the value of proposals was down 26%, due to the timing of calls for proposals, especially from the EU.

96/09 The National Student Satisfaction (NSS) survey results were out that day, CT gave a verbal update, the University had performed better than last year in nine out of ten themes, though was in a similar place in terms of ranking, most of the rest of the sector had also improved their scores. Members congratulated the team on the results.

24/97 FOLLOW UP ON COUNCIL AWAY DAY (Verbal)

97/01 **NOTED:** A verbal update from the Deputy Vice Chancellor on follow up from the Council Away Day held on the 20 May 2025.

CL joined the meeting

24/98 REPORT FROM UNION OF BRUNEL STUDENTS (CO/4120)

98/01 **NOTED:** A report from the Union of Brunel Students to give the Council oversight of its activities.

98/02 Council thanked CL for a clear report and the inclusion of an agenda for next year's areas of focus. It thanked the Union for working with the University to make things as good as possible for the students.

98/03 Members asked for more detail on issues with food; they heard that there were challenges around the type, price and variety of what was on offer, a survey was underway to begin improvements, methods of getting food on campus had changed considerably in recent years with the use of companies such as Deliveroo and Just Eat. Some major catering contracts were up for tender shortly; a central contract had occasionally been found to limit competition and innovation.

98/04 Conversations had started with the University on improving student placements, UBS did not have the gravitas to attract employers, however it could act as a catalyst, working with the PVC for Enterprise and Employment. Open Days were a good opportunity to work together, students often wanted to know where placements would be available to them once they were enrolled. A co-ordinated approach including links to research would also improve conversion rates.

CL left the meeting

24/99 KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (CO/4121)

99/01 **NOTED:** A paper to inform on progress towards achieving the institutional KPIs

99/02 There was a delay to some of the sector data which was overdue from the OfS. Official attrition data was imminent and was looking positive. The University's QS sustainability ranking had improved considerably, though it was not one of Brunel's strategic outcomes, students did bear this in mind and were concerned with university's performance in this area.

99/03 Members drew attention to the attrition data in the report, which had halved over the last 12 months; this was an excellent result and should improve enrolment figures next year. They asked whether it would be possible to have a report on the underlying themes that had delivered these results. It was suggested that a narrative was provided that explained how this had been achieved. **ACTION: JW**

99/04 Council discussed the percentage of good degrees, which was below target and at about the same level as last year. They were low in comparison to competitors. There had been changes to regulations and these would take a couple of years to have an effect on the final figures. Results were proportionate to disciplinary areas and were very good in some cases.

24/95 ELECTION OF THE DEPUTY CHAIR

95/02 (cont.) Janet Dean was elected Deputy Chair of Council. The Chair thanked both candidates for putting themselves forward.

OPERATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

24/100 FINANCIAL POSITION (CO/4122)

100/01 NOTED: Management accounts for 10 months to 31 May 2025

100/02 Members asked whether a further reportable event should be made to the OfS and heard that this would not be necessary, the regulator was in close contact with the University and maintaining a watching brief.

100/03 The College of Engineering, Design and Physical Sciences (CDEPS) would be subject to academic re-sizing, which would have a positive effect on its budget for next year.

24/101 MORTGAGES ON PROPERTIES IN CHURCH ROAD (CO/4123)

101/01 APPROVED: That mortgages should be secured on residential properties at 1, 1a and 3 Church Road and that execution of documents could be authorised on terms agreed by the Chief Operating Officer on behalf of the University.

101/02 Members supported the proposal and said that this was an efficient way of improving finances.

24/102 SALE AND LEASEBACK (CO/4124)

102/01 NOTED: An update on the University's funding position on the income strip.

102/02 Council asked for more detail on the risks involved with an income strip; these were primarily affordability, the leases would be long term and rental would be index linked to the Consumer Price Index (CPI), so would increase. Modelling would commence once terms had been proposed.

102/03 Universities were not being extended much credit in the current financial climate, an income strip would be expensive in the long term, however there

was little other option, the Revolving Credit Facility (RCF) application had been put on hold.

102/04 Members asked what would happen to buildings at the end of the lease and how they would be maintained; the University would continue to look after them, would adhere to the usual building standards and select contractors. The buildings in the income strip would take priority.

102/05 The University needed short term finance, there would probably be break clauses in any agreement which provided some comfort. Council suggested waiting until after clearing before deciding whether to go ahead; negotiations were underway and any firm offer would be brought to Council for discussion.

102/06 Considerable investment was needed in the Brunel estate, capital generated from an income strip could be used for good investment, there was more to consider than the cost of obtaining these funds.

24/103 BUSINESS CASE – ACADEMIC RESIZING 2 (CO/4125)

103/01 **APPROVED:** A proposal to reduce FTE to be delivered across the academic departments, two research centres and some central areas including the four engineering disciplines, Mathematics, Brunel Design School, BCAST and ETC.

103/02 Members asked whether the proposal was affordable and heard that it was and had been modelled into the 2025/26 Budget. The plan had been thought out very carefully and it was hoped that it would re-invigorate the multi-disciplinary area. Council noted that CDEPS had the largest transnational education relationships which it would be important to respect and maintain.

103/03 The effect on students would be positive; largely attracted to programmes rather than departments, the focus would be on programmes being well run. There was a broad spectrum of engineering entry requirements, opportunities for collaboration were bound to emerge. The Executive Dean of the College had successfully conducted similar exercises at other universities.

24/104 2025/26 BUDGET (CO/4126)

104/01 **APPROVED:** The University Budget for 2025/26.

104/02 Cash flow was currently low which highlighted the importance of urgently finding income. Informing the decision on whether to approve the budget was the short term need to bring expenditure to within an acceptable level, the medium-term aim to build areas of growth and continue to make progress towards this and the long-term reality of declining undergraduate numbers and the inevitable increase in competition with other providers. The OfS were monitoring Brunel's situation and requesting frequent reports, which were using up valuable resource.

104/03 This was sobering framing, however there was growing confidence in medium term forecasts and there were upsides, though these should not be overstated.

104/04 Finance forecasts were not fixed and there were issues across the sector, not just at Brunel. The University usually had high numbers of international students but also relatively low levels of debt and high assets.

104/05 In terms of costs, the University was now close to operating within its financial constraints. Many savings had been made that year and much credit should go to the Senior Team.

104/06 It was important to understand the risks around the budget as well as the fact that there were many mitigations and controls being put in place. There was a high level of confidence that the University would move forward and achieve the Budget that it had set.

104/07 Members asked whether the non-pay medical school costs had been included; they had and they would continue to be controlled to keep cash flow within the set limits. The pace of the change required had been challenging and would continue to be.

RESERVED ITEM

[redacted]

GOVERNANCE ASSURANCE

24/106 RISK MANAGEMENT (CO/4127)

106/01 **NOTED:** An update on changes to institutional level risks.

24/107 ANNUAL REPORT ON EDI MONITORING (CO/4128)

107/01 **NOTED:** The annual Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Workforce Monitoring Report.

24/108 ANNUAL REPORT ON OFS COMPLIANCE (CO/4129)

108/01 NOTED: An annual summary of how the University is meeting its ongoing Conditions of Registration.

GOVERNANCE EFFECTIVENESS

24/109 FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM STATEMENT (CO/4130)

109/01 APPROVED: Amendments to the University's Freedom of Speech statement.

24/110 RECOMMENDATIONS ARISING FROM THE HALPIN REVIEW (CO/4131)

110/01 NOTED: Recommendations from the Halpin Partnership Governance Review following discussion by the Governance and Nominations Committee.

24/111 MEMBERSHIP OF COUNCIL AND STANDING COMMITTEES FOR THE FORTHCOMING ACADEMIC YEAR (CO/4132)

111/01 NOTED: A paper setting out the membership of Council for the following year, as well as the membership of Standing Committees.

24/112 ANNUAL REPORT ON THE GOVERNANCE OF THE UNION OF BRUNEL STUDENTS (CO/4133)

112/01 NOTED: The Annual Report on the Governance of the Union of Brunel students.

RECURRENT ITEMS (FOR INFORMATION)

24/113 ANNUAL SCHEDULE OF BUSINESS (CO/4134)

113/01 NOTED: Council's annual schedule of business

24/114 MINUTES OF COUNCIL COMMITTEES (CO/4135)

114/01 NOTED: Minutes from the following meetings:

Governance and Nominations Committee – 13 February 2025

Governance and Nominations Committee – 6 May 2025

Governance and Nominations Committee - 12 May 2025

Audit and Risk Committee – 24 February 2025

Finance Committee - 25 February 2025

Remuneration Committee (unconfirmed) – 11 February 2025

Governance and Nominations Committee (unconfirmed) – 3 June 2025

Audit and Risk Committee (unconfirmed) – 9 June 2025

Finance Committee (unconfirmed) – 29 April 2025

Finance Committee (unconfirmed) - 10 June 2025

24/115 ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE REMUNERATION COMMITTEE (CO/4136)

115/01 NOTED: The annual report from the Remuneration Committee.

24/116 REPORT ON BUSINESS DISCUSSED AT SENATE (CO/4137)

116/01 NOTED: A report to Council on matters arising from the meetings of Senate held on the 12 March and 25 June 2025.

24/117 BRUNEL EVENTS (CO/4138)

117/01 NOTED: Upcoming events at Brunel that may be of interest to Council members.

24/118 OFS COMPLIANCE SUMMARY (CO/4139)

118/01 NOTED: Assurance of how the University is meeting ongoing Conditions of Registration.

24/119 SEALING OF DOCUMENTS (CO/4140)

119/01 NOTED: The Register of Sealed Documents.

24/120 ANY OTHER BUSINESS AND FEEDBACK ON THE CURRENT MEETING

120/01 Graduation would be held next week, as well as the Installation of the new Rector of the University, Professor Dame Jocelyn Bell Burnell, who had been

appointed to the Order of the Companions of Honour in the recent King's Birthday Honours.

120/02 There being no further business to discuss, the meeting was ended at 5:15pm

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: 2pm, Wednesday 1 October 2025

Meeting Minutes Approved:

Professor Stuart Palmer, Chairperson	Date