
Minutes of the 333rd COUNCIL meeting, Wednesday, 23rd November 2022 in Room 144/145, Conference Aston and by videoconference

PRESENT:	Dame Yve Buckland (Chair) Emmanuelle Labeau Kathy Cooper Neil Scott Dr Matthew Crummack Dr Sue Noffke* Atul Rana	Professor Aleks Subic Bobby Thandi Amardeep Gill Shaid Parveen Dr Vij Randeniya* Tim Pile Dr Phil Popham
APOLOGIES:	Dr Jason Wouhra Professor Gill Nicholls	
IN ATTENDANCE:	Sir John Sunderland Saskia Hansen Professor George Feiger	Gary Hughes Professor Stephen Garrett Richard Billingham

*indicates member of Council present on Teams

Governance Matters

22/01 **Apologies for absence**

Apologies were received from Dr Jason Wouhra, and Professor Gill Nicholls. It was noted that Dr Rob Perrins had resigned as an independent member and on behalf of the Council the Pro-Chancellor expressed her gratitude for his service over the previous eight years.

22/02 **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were received.

Minutes

22/03 RESOLVED:

To approve the Minutes of the 332nd meeting of the Council, held on 6th July 2022.

22/04 **Matters Arising**

Paper CO/22/02 was received and noted.

22/05 **Summary of the Council/Executive Away Day**

Paper CO/22/03 being a summary of the Council and Executive away day on the 2nd November 2022 was received and noted.

22/06 **Decisions Taken Under Chair's Authority**

NOTED:

- That the Pro-Chancellor had approved submission to the Office for Students of the Access and Participation Plan following consultation with Professor Gill Nicholls.
- That the Pro-Chancellor had approved the appointment of Amardeep Gill as an Independent Member of Council on the recommendation of the Nomination and Governance Committee and following consultation with all members of Council.

STANDING REPORTS FROM OFFICERS/MEMBERS

Vice- Chancellors Report

22/07 RECEIVED:

Paper CO/22/04 together with an oral report from the Vice-Chancellor. The following points were noted:

- The Vice-Chancellor had, since taking up post, undertaken extensive engagement with the Executive and their teams, members of Council and the Students Union, and key external partners. These meetings had been very productive in setting the strategic vision and performance expectations internally and developing key external relationships that would support the delivery of the strategy.
- A number of projects had been initiated and were developing at pace with respect to the campus development, and these would be key to supporting student and commercial revenue growth, which are critical for Aston's financial sustainability, organisational resilience and staff retention/attraction.
- That Saskia Loer Hansen and Neil Scott would be leaving the University. With these departures some changes were being implemented to the Executive with Louise Parr-Morley joining as Interim CFO, Richard Billingham stepping into the Interim COO role, and Dahlia Dasgupta being appointed as Interim Executive Director of HR & OD. Liam Nevin had been appointed to the role of University Secretary with responsibility for governance, legal, and risk and assurance. These appointments would provide high levels of assurance for business continuity as well as address much needed diversity and inclusion profile on the executive team

22/08 RESOLVED:

That the report be noted, and that Council express its thanks to Saskia Loer Hansen and Neil Scott for their service to the University.

Pro- Chancellors Report

22/09 RECEIVED:

An oral report from the Pro-Chancellor noting:

- That the Council agenda and decision making would need to be adaptive to address the emerging strategy and the implementation requirements.
- Key Performance indicators and strategic risks to be reported to Council would be developed as part of this process.
- Agile decision making would be required to reflect the commercial imperatives of campus developments and the Finance and Infrastructure Committee would need to meet at short notice.
- Further consideration would need to be given to the delegations required to facilitate agile decision making to avoid the delay of having to bring decisions to Council.

President of the Students' Union Report

- 22/10 RECEIVED:
Paper CO/22/05 being the report of the President of the Students Union summarising the activity of the President and the Sabbatical Team since taking office.
- 22/11 NOTED:
Council commended the President on the breadth of activity being undertaken by the Team and in particular the positive work being done with the support of the University Executive to address the cost- of living crisis.

STRATEGY AND PERFORMANCE

PRESENTATION ON LEAGUE TABLE RANKINGS

- 22/15 RECEIVED:
- A presentation from the Executive Director of Marketing and Recruitment providing an analysis of the university performance in the Times and Sunday Times, the Guardian league tables and in relation specifically to international league tables - QSS and Times Higher Education.
- 22/16 NOTED:
- That the Executive had developed an improvement plan to address the challenges presented by the evidence as summarised in the presentation and this would be subject to further feedback to Council as the plan was implemented.

PRESENTATION ON NSS SURVEY AND ACTION PLAN

- 22/17 RECEIVED:
- A presentation from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Engagement) addressing the 2022 NSS survey results.
- 22/18 NOTED:
- The overall satisfaction rate for the University was 76% which represented a 1% increase on the 2021 result.
 - The sector average had increased by 1% on the 2021 figure and Aston was now 0.15% above the sector average.
- 22/19 DISCUSSED:
- That work was being done to develop a comprehensive digital system to gauge student feedback in real time and this would address the low reporting rates and manual systems currently in use and which were limited in their effectiveness. This would be introduced in 2023 and would facilitate evidence- based reporting to Council.
 - That the evidence from the presentations would inform the development of the People Strategy.
 - That the proposed digital system would also help students to see the impact of interventions made to reflect their feedback.

STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER

- 22/20 RECEIVED:
Paper CO/22/07 being the updated strategic risk register.
- 22/21 NOTED:

- That the existing approach to strategic risk would be reviewed in tandem with the development of strategic measure to support the 2030 strategy, and that the current arrangements for managing risk would also be reviewed and refreshed following recruitment of a Risk and Assurance Manager.
- That the risk register and the current risk processes had been discussed at Audit and Risk Committee and there was a shared understanding that the University needed to develop an assurance map and a process that ensured risk management was adopted as a consistent management tool.
- That the refresh of strategic risks and the supporting management processes would be reported through the Audit and Risk Committee.

REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

Referred by the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC)

Reports from the October and November meetings of ARC

22/22 RECEIVED:

Papers CO/22/07 & 08 being the upward reports from the October and November meetings of the committee.

22/23 NOTED:

- The content of the upward reports, with the Chair of the Committee reminding the Council that the Committee membership was new, and it would bring a fresh perspective in testing the evidence around assurance.
- That the October committee meeting had escalated the outcomes of two “needs improvement” internal audit reports, and continuing concerns around data quality as expressed in the annual report of the Committee.
- That the November committee meeting had escalated concerns around the number of students and staff reporting issues with mental well-being and mental ill-health, whilst also recognising the commendable work being done by the University to provide support.

Annual Reports and Accounts for 2021/22 and Letter of Representation

22/24 RECEIVED:

- The Annual Report and Financial Statements concerning the University and its subsidiary, the assessment of going concern and the letter of representation to the University auditors.

22/25 RESOLVED:

That the Council:

- Approve the draft financial statements on the recommendation of Audit and Risk Committee
- Approve the assessment of going concern
- Approve the content of the letter of representation

Annual Report of the Audit and Risk Committee

22/26 RECEIVED:

- The annual report of the Audit and Risk Committee to Council for 2021/22

22/27 NOTED:

- That based on the evidence it considered during 2021/22 the Committee is reasonably satisfied that the University has implemented and, is committed to maintaining, appropriate and effective arrangements for risk management, control and governance; and economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

Referred by Finance and Infrastructure Committee

22/28 RECEIVED:

- Papers CO/22/11&12 being the upward reports from Finance and Infrastructure Committee.

Referred by the Nomination and Governance Committee

22/30 RECEIVED:

- Papers CO/22/14&15 being the upwards reports from the Nomination and Governance Committee

Referred by Remuneration and Workforce Strategy Committee

22/31 RECEIVED:

- Papers CO/22/16&17 being the upwards reports from the Remuneration and Workforce Strategy Committee.

22/32 NOTED:

- That the Committee had escalated concerns in relation to pending industrial action (discussed and recorded at minute 22/12 -22/14)

Referred by Senate

22/33 RECEIVED:

- Paper CO/22/18 being the upwards report from the Senate meeting of the 9th November 2022.

ITEMS FOR INFORMATION/ENDORSEMENT WITHOUT DISCUSSION

Statutory Reports

Annual Reports

Annual Report on Compliance with the Prevent Duty

22/34 RESOLVED:

- That Council approve the Prevent Duty Annual Accountability Declaration

Modern Slavery Statement 2021/22

22/35 RESOLVED:

- That Council approve the Modern Slavery Act statement for 2021/22

Annual Report on Student Complaints

22/36 RESOLVED:

- That Council note the Annual Review of Student Complaints for 2021/22.

Date of Council's Next Meeting

Wednesday 8th February 2022 at 1.30pm.