

Minutes of the 338th COUNCIL meeting, Wednesday 27 March 2024 in the Council Room, Chancellery, John Cadbury House and by Microsoft Teams

PRESENT: Dame Yve Buckland (Chair) Shaid Parveen
Kathy Cooper* Tim Pile
Dr Matthew Crummack Dr Phil Popham*
Amardeep Gill Atul Rana
Professor Osama Khan Professor Aleks Subic
Professor Gill Nicholls* Dr Jason Wouhra*
Dr Sue Noffke

APOLOGIES: Emmanuelle Labeau Dr Vij Randeniya

IN ATTENDANCE: Richard Billingham Liam Nevin
Dalia Dasgupta (M23/74-76) Julie Ottley
Craig Jones

* Attendance by Teams

23/59 Apologies for absence
Apologies were received from Emmanuelle Labeau and Dr Vij Randeniya.

23/60 Declarations of Interest
Shaid Parveen declared interest for item 3.1 Vice-Chancellor's Report and would join the meeting after this matter.

23/61 Minutes
The minutes of the 337th meeting of the Council were agreed as a true and accurate record.

23/62 Matters Arising
The buddy system for independent members with Executive Officers had been set-up with first meetings having taken place or been scheduled.

STANDING REPORTS FROM OFFICERS/MEMBERS

Vice-Chancellor's Report

23/63 RECEIVED:
Paper CO/23/17 being the Vice-Chancellor's report to Council.

23/64 NOTED:

- UCAS home applications were +3.84% compared to last year (excluding medicine). Aston was performing well compared to sector, which was -0.5% on applications and compared to our competitor group which was -4.1% on applications.
- Aston had been awarded Athena Gold at institutional level, being only the third University to receive this accolade in UK, second in England and first in the West Midlands.
- An incentivised voluntary severance scheme had been announced to address the need to adjust the cost base and realign operations and resourcing in line with 2030 Strategy.
- The first winter graduation ceremony would take place on 20 January 2025 for postgraduate and degree apprenticeship students. This was of particular importance to international students whose visas typically expired before the summer graduation ceremonies.

- On 27th February, the University held a dinner in the House of Lords on the theme of Birmingham Innovation Quarter: An innovation district for inclusive growth.” The discussions focussed on the role Aston is playing as a catalyst for the Birmingham Innovation Quarter and the event a great success in providing a platform to engage with shadow ministers and MPs, business leaders and policy makers.
- Sir Peter Rigby had been appointed as the Honorary Chair of Aston’s new Digital Futures Institute.
- Professor Gurpreet (Gups) Singh Japal had accepted the role of Chief Commercial Officer , which replaces the role of PVC Engagement and provides a clearer focus, responsibility and accountability for key elements of the omni-channel growth strategy. Corrina Fletcher had been appointed to the role of Chief People Officer.
- It was noted that the KTP annual showcase was being held on the 12th June and members were encouraged to attend if possible.

23/65 CONSIDERED:

Pro-Chancellor’s Report

23/67 RECEIVED:

An oral report from the Pro-Chancellor on her final meeting as Chair of Council.

23/68 NOTED:

- The Pro-Chancellor reflected on her time as Chair of Council and highlighted major improvements in key areas including University reputation, desire to be ambitious and take risks, pace to get things done, and the relationship between the University and Students’ Union.
- The Pro-Chancellor thanked all who she had worked with throughout her period of office.
- It was noted that this was the final Council meeting for Dalia Dasgupta, the Interim Chief People Officer, and the Chair thanked her on behalf of Council for her work with the Executive.

President of the Students’ Union Report

23/69 RECEIVED:

Paper CO/23/18 being an update from the President of the Students’ Union.

23/70 NOTED:

- The Students’ Union would be undertaking a review of strategy and structure for a more efficient and effective organisation that would give students the best experience.
- Data presented at a recent conference had highlighted the importance of belonging and community and evidenced that this directly impacted better outcomes for students. Aston was proactive in community building amongst students and must continue to be innovative and agile in this activity.
- The President thanked the Pro-Chancellor for her support of him personally and for the previous Presidents, the Students’ Union and student voice, during her time on Council.

STRATEGY AND PERFORMANCE

Degree Apprenticeship Ofsted update

23/71 RECEIVED:

Paper CO/23/19 being an update on the Degree Apprenticeship Ofsted inspection.

23/72 NOTED:

- That at the New Provider Monitoring Visit in September 2022, Ofsted had concluded that 'reasonable progress' had been in the degree apprenticeship (DA) and adult learning (AL) provision.
- A full inspection by Ofsted was expected after around 18 months of the monitoring visit and this took place during w/c 11 March 2024.
- A significant amount of work had been completed at pace by all colleagues involved in DA and AL provision in preparation for the inspection.
- Ofsted's remit was entirely on the quality of curriculum, its implementation and learner experience, undertaking 'deep dives' to scrutinise 'Intent, Implementation and Impact'.

23/73 DISCUSSED:

Aston People Strategy

23/74 RECEIVED:
A presentation from CPO (Paper CO/23/20) being the Aston People Strategy.

23/75 NOTED:

- Following feedback from Workforce and Remuneration Committee, a table of underpinning frameworks and policies that support the People Strategy were to be added to the document prior to publishing.
- The HR and OD function was now structured and resourced appropriately to support and facilitate the change and transformation needed to meet Aston 2030 and to lead on the implementation of the People Strategy.
- A new post of Deputy CPO had been appointed and was in post. The new substantive CPO would start in June 2024 and these were key appointments in delivery of the strategy.

23/76 DISCUSSED:

- Dr Noffke confirmed that the Remuneration and Workforce Committee had reviewed the Strategy and were supportive of it.
- It was agreed that implementation plans would be developed identifying the success measures and milestones to be achieved over the length of the Strategy.

23/77 **RESOLVED:**
That Council approve the Aston People Strategy.

Aston On-Line Transformation

23/78 RECEIVED:
A presentation from DVCA (paper CO/23/21) being an introduction to the strategic partnership with Online Education Services (OES).

23/79 NOTED:

Action: Strategy Away Day to include a session on omni-channel delivery models.

REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

Referred by Audit and Risk Committee

23/81 RECEIVED:
Paper CO/23/22 being the upward report from the March Audit and Risk Committee.

23/82 NOTED:

- The contents of the upwards report.
- 23/83 DISCUSSED:

- KPMG had produced a draft report on Apprenticeship Funding Review. The PwC audit on DA funding, therefore, had been removed from the Plan and an alternative audit to replace this would be agreed by the Committee.
- ARC had not been involved in the commissioning of the review by KPMG and controls had been put in place to address this.
- Management had agreed to resource to deploy a temporary resource to mitigate the risks of the IT General Controls audit, pending the recruitment of a Change and Testing Manager.
- Good progress was being made with risk management processes.

Referred by Finance and Infrastructure Committee

23/84 RECEIVED:
Paper CO/23/23 being the upward report from the March Finance and Infrastructure Committee.

23/85 NOTED:
• The content of the upwards report.

23/86 DISCUSSED

Referred by Senate

23/91 RECEIVED:
Paper CO/23/24 being the upward report from the Senate meeting held on 6 March 2024.

23/92 NOTED:
That Senate had ratified the nominees for this year's honorary degrees in accordance with the recommendations of the Awards and Honours Committee.

Referred by Remuneration and Workforce Strategy Committee

23/97 RECEIVED:
Paper CO/23/26 being the upward report from the March Remuneration and Workforce Strategy Committee.

23/98 NOTED:
The annual Staff Diversity and Inclusion report provided positive assurance of initiatives that were underway.

Date of Next Meeting

23/99 The next Council meeting was on Wednesday 19 June 2024 (lunch 12:30-13:30 meeting 13:30-17:00) in the Council Room, Chancellery, John Cadbury House.