



Council effectiveness review

Outcome requested:	Governance Committee is asked to consider the outcomes of the annual review of Council effectiveness and proposed recommendations.
Executive Summary:	<p>Each year, the Council Secretariat undertakes a review of the effectiveness of Council based on written feedback and one-to-one meetings with the Chair of Council held in the spring.</p> <p>Following discussions with the Chairs of Finance and Investment Committee and Audit and Risk Committee it was decided that Committee effectiveness reviews would be delayed until early 2021.</p> <p>The effectiveness review for Remuneration Committee will be completed after its final meeting on 29 July 2020.</p>
QMUL Strategy:	Effective governance supports the achievement of all strategic aims.
Internal/External regulatory/statutory reference points:	The CUC Code of Governance recommends that governing bodies should undertake a formal and rigorous evaluation of their effectiveness not less than every five years.
Strategic Risks:	N/A
Equality Impact Assessment:	N/A
Subject to prior and onward consideration by:	The outcomes will be shared with Council.
Confidential paper under FOIA/DPA	No.
Timing:	N/A
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Date:	30 June 2020
Senior Management/External Sponsor	Jonathan Morgan, Chief Governance Officer and University Secretary

Annual Review of Council and Committee effectiveness

1. Each year the Council Secretariat undertakes a review of the effectiveness of Council. The review of Council effectiveness is conducted as part of the annual meetings between the Chair and members, held this year between March and June. Members complete self-assessment forms prior to meeting with the Chair which provide to the discussions and facilitate the collection of written feedback.
2. This paper summarises the comments from members provided in the self-assessment forms and discussions with the Chair. The Committee is asked to **consider** the proposed recommendations.

Summary of feedback

Areas that work well

Meeting effectiveness

- i. Council meetings are conducted effectively and professionally with sufficient discussion focusing on the right issues. The range of views within Council are encouraged to be aired and then drawn together to a fair summary and decision on the way forward that takes account of both the spread and centre of gravity of opinion.
- ii. The decisions are clear and the decision making process is transparent and rigorous.
- iii. The Chair has been pivotal in creating the conditions for overall Council effectiveness and the style and tone of discussions, ensuring there is the right blend of support and challenge formally and informally.
- iv. There has been good engagement with the Students' Union including constructive and respectful challenge in both directions.
- v. The agendas have been more focused on Council business and less on providing a platform for individuals/departments to showcase their work at a level inappropriate to Council.

Timeliness and frequency of meetings

- i. Council provides timely information and discussion as evidenced by the number of 'urgent Council meetings' over the past 12 months, e.g. on USS pension scheme, UCU industrial actions, Covid-19 pandemic impact.
- ii. The shorter more frequent Council meetings have been a good way to keep in touch with issues. It has been efficient to have dedicated sessions for specific topics, e.g. USS issues.
- iii. Post-Coronavirus, we could continue with much of this more agile way of working as well as being able to meet face to face again.

Interaction between Council and SET

- i. The interactions between Council and SET have been effective and productive. It has been highly impressive to see how the President and Principal and the Senior Executive have risen and responded to the extraordinary challenge of Covid-19.

Council Composition and skill set

- i. Council has the right mix of skills, knowledge, experience and diversity, as evidenced in the discussions on governance, HE and FE, finance and pensions, and most recently on the Furlough scheme.
- ii. Clear progress has been made since the last Skills Matrix was completed to ensure good diversity on the Council and the gender balance is very good. Succession planning has improved.
- iii. The diversity of Council was considered to be among the strongest in the sector.

Information provided to Council

- i. The papers make clear what is required of Council. Papers are timely and well-presented and presentations for the most part clear and concise.
- ii. The data provided to Council is transparent enabling members to be proactive in making decisions. The willingness to be transparent with data demonstrates the University's integrity and pragmatism in shaping its future.

Governance support

- i. The Governance team has been efficient, reliable and timely but also value-adding, through ensuring well-drafted, succinct, summaries and board papers, including consultation responses.

Communications with Council

- i. Members appreciated the regular updates provided via Convene, in particular in relation to the coronavirus communications sent to students and staff.

The work of the Senior Executive Team

- i. Members welcomed the latest initiative to introduce better performance management (as presented by Sheila Gupta).
- ii. It is clear that the Principal and the Senior Executive are working to address the problem areas within QMUL, for example EDI.
- iii. The Principal sets the tone for the SET and key issues are brought to Council. While I greatly admire Colin's determination to take ultimate responsibility for all that is done, I do worry whether this means that some of SET do abdicate their own personal responsibility for actions/decisions under their command.

Areas for further improvement:

Council composition and skill set

- i. Council would be enhanced by the addition of non-UK members to bring in cultural diversity and challenge.
- ii. We needed to be alert to the risk of 'group think' by identifying possible traps and keeping discussion open.

Information provided to Council

- i. Council should implement the Advance HE recommendation to have strategic deep dives at every meeting. However, some deep dives have presented a positive narrative without sufficient challenge.
- ii. On occasion, papers can be overlong with too much information in annexes. The key decisions and recommendations could be made clearer and the trade-offs involved more explicit.
- iii. Council spends a greater proportion of its time on financial and physical capital when compared with human resources.

Council – SET interaction

- i. There is scope for more visibility from SET at Council.

University strategy

- i. Some Council members felt it would be helpful to have an indication of alternative or backup strategies.

Council relations

- i. Members would welcome more opportunities to informally interact with each other and with the Senior Executive outside of meetings.

Communications

- i. A weekly email from the Senior Executive focussing on priorities related to Covid-19 would be welcomed, e.g. cash, people, regulator.
- ii. A schedule of Council member activity could be included in the board pack to highlight Council involvement between meetings. This could also be communicated to staff to make the board feel closer to those leading and working in the organisation.

Relations with the student body

- i. There is scope for Council to provide a bit more support in some way to the students such as attending student activities to see what day to day life is like for them.

Council secretariat

- i. Members would welcome longer to prepare for meetings and more notice of additional meetings.
- ii. The size of the Collette Bowe room is not conducive to good discussion.

Recommendations:

- a) Continued improvement on the quality and suitability of information supplied to Council
- b) Governance Committee to consider cultural diversity as an attribute in recruitment of upcoming Council member appointments.
- c) More visibility from SET at meetings. The Council Secretariat will continue to organise 1-1 meetings between Council members on the SET on request.
- d) Increased opportunities for interaction outside of meetings once the lockdown has ended.