

COUNCIL
Thursday 18 November 2021

CONFIRMED MINUTES

Present:

Tim Clement-Jones (Chair)	Professor Colin Bailey	Professor Alison Blunt
Sarah Cowls	Professor Kavita Datta	Professor Colin Grant
Professor Yang Hao	Isabelle Jenkins	Dr Philippa Lloyd
Professor Mangala Patel	Dr Alix Pryde	Luke Savage
Melissa Tatton	Peter Thompson	David Willis

In attendance:

Sarah Barnes [minute 2021.019]	Emily Burns [minute 2021.019]	Natt Day [minute 2021.019]
Sarah Gifford [minute 2021.019]	Claire Harris [minute 2021.019]	Karen Kröger
Simon Lewis [minute 2021.019]	Dr Nadine Lewycky	Jonathan Morgan
Afsana Salik [minute 2021.019]	Saynab Sharif	Stuart Shilson
Phil Warburton [minute 2021.019]		

Apologies:

Ade Adefulu	Celia Gough	Stella Hall
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Welcome and apologies

2021.014 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted the apologies.

Minutes of the meeting held on 07 October 2021 (Paper QM2021/12)

2021.015 Council **confirmed** the confidential and non-confidential minutes of the meeting held on 07 October 2021.

Chair's update (Oral report)

2021.016 [a] The Chair said that he was looking forward to participating in the interviews for the Vice-Principal (Health). The field of candidates was strong and he was confident that a good appointment would be made.

President and Principal's Report (QM2021/13)

2021.017 Council **discussed** the President and Principal's Report. The following points were noted in the discussion:

Industrial action

[a] The University and College Union (UCU) had recently held two ballots on pensions and pay and conditions. UCU achieved a mandate for strike action at 58 universities. At Queen Mary, UCU had not met the required 50% threshold to achieve a mandate for strike action or action short of a strike. UCU were considering their options including a nationally aggregated re-ballot on pay and conditions in the new year. At those universities where a mandate had been achieved, there would be several days of strike action in early December. Although Queen Mary would not be immediately impacted, the strikes were coming at a time when the sector's reputation with the public and government was low. Council said that it was remarkable that a small number of staff, with 4% voting in favour of strike action, could have such a significant impact on teaching and learning and the student experience.

Covid 19

[b] A rise in case numbers would trigger the introduction of the Government's Plan B. The sector was working with the Government to minimise any disruption in the event that Plan B was introduced. There was no evidence of transmission in halls of residence or in teaching environments and isolation had a significant impact on the mental health of students.

Life Sciences

[c] On 2nd November we completed the purchase of Plot C at Whitechapel. The deal was a crucial step forward in the development of our vision for Life Sciences, providing an opportunity to develop a state-of-the-art Life Sciences research and education facility adjacent to our existing campus in Whitechapel. The development will accelerate plans to deliver our vision, shared with Barts Trust, to establish East London as an international powerhouse in Life Sciences, creating jobs, developing skills, addressing health inequalities and attracting inward investment from industry. We were working with NHS Property Services to secure the necessary planning permissions for this and the wider Whitechapel Life Sciences Cluster and refining the academic vision for the site. Congratulations were extended to all those who worked on completing the deal.

Policy environment

[d] We were awaiting confirmation of the UK's association with Horizon Europe, the future of which had become embroiled with the wider issues around Brexit. The Government's position remained focused on the UK becoming an associated country to Horizon Europe. The Government had earmarked funds for this and the Spending Review confirmed that there was a Plan B whereby funding for Horizon Europe could be used on alternatives if necessary, with the overall research and innovation envelope protected. We currently had £98m worth of proposals in progress for Horizon Europe.

Funding success

- [e] We had been awarded £1.7m in capital teaching funding by the Office for Students as part of their new process of sector-wide competitive bidding. This was the second consecutive year we had been successful in securing near the maximum amount.

- [f] The university had recently announced the creation of 25 new lectureships in Humanities and Social Sciences. Council asked whether the investment in posts in the arts and humanities was at odds with the Government's position on divesting from certain subjects. We were making efforts to re-shape the university by removing or reducing modules where there was evidence to do so. Investment would be made in areas that aligned to the university's research themes. We had already established one university research institute, the Digital Environment Research Institute (DERI), and had agreed the next two in Sustainability and Precision Health. Council would be presented with a deep dive on the research themes and university research institutes in May.

QMSU President's report (QM2021/14)

2021.018 Council **received** the QMSU President's report. The following points were noted in the discussion:

- [a] The sabbatical officers had been gathering feedback from students across the different campuses ahead of the Annual Members Meeting later this month. The QMSU President had co-hosted an event with the Director of Marketing and Communications and the Vice-Principal (People, Culture and Inclusion) for members of the Senior Executive, student council members and student society leaders.

- [b] There was an increased demand for contemplation and quiet spaces and work was underway to identify alternative spaces.

- [c] There was greater student engagement with sports teams and societies this year. The first Volunteer Fair was coming up later this month with 20 local organisations expected to join on campus.

- [d] Council asked what safety measures had been introduced to combat drink spiking in the university's venues. Students were provided with an emergency number connecting them directly to Security. Students were also signposted to the Advice and Counselling Service and Report and Support.

Deep dive presentation on civic and community engagement (Presentation)

2021.019 Council **received** a presentation on civic and community engagement. The following points were noted in the discussion:

- [a] Queen Mary had strong roots in the local area and a strong tradition of active public and civic engagement. This helped us make the case to the public for the contribution of universities to their communities and supported our work for the Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF).

- [b] The Centre for Public Engagement (CPE) supported staff to engage the public with teaching and research. CPE engaged internally to share best practice, deliver training and provide guidance on embedding public engagement into research funding applications. Queen Mary's strong tradition of public engagement meant that it attracted academics with an interest in this area. The CPE had been awarded the first ever platinum watermark for excellence in public engagement by the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE). Only universities with at least three years at the gold standard were eligible for platinum status and we needed to demonstrate how we would leverage our platinum status to be an exemplar in the sector.
- [c] Council asked how CPE supported the medical research projects in the local community. CPE provided training to academics and clinicians to support engagement. The success of large-scale research projects, such as the East London Genes and Health, relied on the strong bond of trust between the university and the community.
- [d] Public engagement was a pathway to impact which was evaluated in the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and the KEF. In the first KEF exercise, we were in the top 10% in our cluster for public engagement. A review of support for Knowledge Exchange highlighted areas where the CPE, Knowledge Exchange and Impact, and Careers services can work more closely together. This work would be supported by the new Deputy Vice-Principal (Impact) roles.
- [e] There have been some initial conversations about community engagement with UCL ahead of the opening of UCL East in September 2022. We were co-ordinating efforts with other universities in the area to ensure that our community engagement added value.

Finance and Investment Committee minutes (QM2021/15)

2021.020 Council **received** the Finance and Investment Committee minutes of the meeting held on 03 November 2021. The following points were noted in the discussion:

- [a] There had been a difference of only £0.3m between the Period 12 accounts and the annual financial statements. The Committee commended the Chief Financial Officer and her team for the improvements in this area.
- [b] The Committee had approved a recommendation from the sub-group to appoint Barclays and Cazenove as investment managers for the endowment investment fund.

Current financial position (QM2021/16)

2021.021 Council **received** the current financial position. The following points were noted in the discussion:

- [a] The management accounts were positive early in the year. Tuition fee income was up on last year and included some income from the January starts. Capital expenditure, which had been delayed because of Covid,

would be progressing this year and would impact on the cash balance, which also did not reflect the recent purchase of Plot C. A more definitive picture of student enrolment figures would be available in December.

Audit Committee annual report (QM2021/17)

2021.022 Council **considered** the Audit and Risk Committee annual report for 2020–21. The following points were noted in the discussion:

- [a] Audit and Risk Committee was required to produce an annual report including the Committee's conclusions on the university's risk management and governance, data quality for external returns, and value for money. There was nothing in the report that needed to be drawn to the attention of Council. The attendance of Committee members had been exemplary and Council thanked them for their hard work.
- [b] Council **approved** the Audit and Risk Committee annual report for 2020–21 for submission to the Office for Students.

External Auditor letter of representation (QM2021/18)

2021.023 Council **considered** the external auditor letter of representation. The following points were noted in the discussion:

- [a] The university had an inter-company receivable with the Malta subsidiary for £6.7m. It was expected that the Maltese Government would contribute €8m to the operating activities of the subsidiary and discussions were ongoing. Even if this was not forthcoming, the higher than planned admissions meant that the loan could be repaid from operating activities alone. It had been concluded that it was appropriate not to recognise provision for impairment against this receivable.
- [b] We had received some late contributions from Deloitte about the schedule of uncorrected misstatements. The number was significantly below materiality.
- [c] Audit and Risk Committee had asked for, and received, assurance from the senior management representatives present that there was no reason that the letter could not be recommended to Council.
- [d] Council **approved** the external auditor letter of representation for submission to the Office for Students on the recommendation of the Audit and Risk Committee.

External Audit annual report (QM2021/19)

2021.024 Council **received** the external audit report. The following points were noted in the discussion:

- [a] Before its last meeting, the Committee had held its annual *in camera* meeting with the external auditors. There was nothing arising from the meeting that needed to be reported to Council. There had been some minor recommendations in relation to the cut-off of income and expenditure.

Council commended the Finance team for a successful audit.

[b] Council **approved** the external audit opinion for 2020–21.

Internal Audit annual report (QM2021/20)

2021.025 [a] Council **considered** the internal audit report for 2020–21. There was nothing in the Head of Internal Audit Opinion that needed to be drawn to the attention of Council.

Audited Financial Statements and commentary (QM2021/21)

2021.026 Council **considered** the Audited Financial Statements and commentary for the year end 31 July 2021. The following points were noted in the discussion:

[a] There had been a difference of £0.3m between the Period 12 management accounts and the financial statements.

[b] The narrative explained the write-off of costs incurred in the planning submission for the School of Business and Management that had not received a positive response in 2019. Work undertaken to RIBA stage 4, along with the costs of the planning application and planning appeal would be written off to the value of £3.8m. £1.3m could be directly attributable to the future development of the site and would remain as capital costs.

[c] The going concern assessment evaluated the liquidity situation and loan covenants under certain scenarios, especially the loss of international students and the possible outcomes of the USS negotiations. Due to the accounting treatment, there would be a big swing in the USS pension scheme deficit next year which would push those universities in the scheme into deficit. On the recommendation of Deloitte, we have added a note to show that the value of the deficit, were an agreement reached on the 2020 valuation, would be £196m and £316m if no agreement was reached.

[d] Council asked how we benchmarked against the Russell Group on research income and expenditure. A new policy had been introduced to improve our overhead recovery which lagged behind our competitors.

[e] Council **approved** the audited financial statements and commentary for the year end 31 July 2021 on the recommendation of Audit and Risk Committee.

Audit and Risk Committee report (QM2021/22)

2021.027 Council **noted** the executive summary of the Audit and Risk Committee meeting held on 09 November 2021.

Recommendation to appoint external auditors (QM2021/23)

2021.028 Council **considered** and **approved** the recommendation of Audit and Risk Committee to appoint the external auditors from 1 March 2022.

Health, Safety and Fire annual report (QM2021/24)

2021.029 Council **received** the annual report on fire, health and safety for 2020–21. The following points were noted in the discussion:

- [a] The annual report had been positively received by the Health and Safety Advisory Group which comprised representatives from the major trade unions on campus. Council said that the report showed that we were fulfilling our responsibilities across a wide breadth of activities. Council commended the Director of Health and Safety and her team for their excellent work.

Prevent return (QM2021/25)

2021.030 Council **considered** the Prevent duty annual accountability declaration for submission to the Office for Students. The following points were noted in the discussion:

- [a] The data return was narrower in scope than previous years but required greater detail on the nature of any Prevent-related issues considered during the year. There were no Prevent-related cases to report.
- [b] The Freedom of Speech bill currently being considered by parliament could have an impact on our responsibilities in relation to Prevent and we were monitoring this closely.
- [c] The lines in Table 2 were misaligned and would be corrected before submission. Council otherwise **approved** the Prevent Duty annual accountability declaration for submission the Office for Students.

Whistle blowing policy (QM2021/26)

2021.031 Council **considered** the revised whistle blowing policy. The following points were noted in the discussion:

- [a] The policy had been refreshed as part of the scheduled triennial review for which external legal advice had been sought. There were no substantive changes but the wording had been updated to make it more accessible.
- [b] Council **approved** the revised whistle blowing policy.

Senate report (QM2021/27)

2021.032 Council **noted** the report of the Senate meeting held on 21 October 2021. The following points were noted in the discussion:

- [a] The Freedom of Speech Bill had reached the report stage in the House of Commons. Two exercises would be undertaken to review the university's freedom of speech policy and align it with the Bill. We would seek external legal advice and engage with academics and students about the issues raised. The risk was low as we had a good working relationship with QMSU on events and invited speakers.

[b] The Office for Students (OfS) was consulting on the ongoing conditions of registration that related to academic quality and standards. The new conditions currently being consulted on were more focused on skills. The move to skills would be significant as Higher Education did not currently have national frameworks and benchmarks around this. It was expected that retention and employability would become the key metrics in assessing quality going forwards.

Academic accountability annual report (QM2021/28)

2021.033 Council **considered** the academic accountability annual report. The following points were noted in the discussion:

[a] Senate's annual assurance to Council detailed the formal governance arrangements for managing academic standards and quality during the 2020–21 academic year. Arrangements made to mitigate the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on student assessment, progression and award were co-created with students. The successful delivery of our Mixed Mode Education which allowed students to participate fully whether in person or online required the upgrade of audio-visual equipment in rooms across campus and training for academics. Council had received reports on our compliance with consumer protection law in relation to undergraduate and postgraduate taught students earlier in the year.

Remuneration Committee report and Remuneration annual report (QM2021/29&30)

2021.034 Council **received** the Remuneration Committee report for meetings on 8 and 25 October 2021. The following points were noted in the discussion:

[a] The Committee agreed to extend the attendance of the QMSU President on a trial basis. The Committee had considered the Office for Student's survey on Vice-Chancellor pay. The Committee of University Chairs (CUC) had published an updated Remuneration Code which the Committee would consider in the new year.

Use of the common seal (QM2021/31)

2021.035 Council **noted** the use of the Common Seal since the last meeting.

Agenda for the next meeting (QM2021/32)

2021.036 Council **noted** the agenda for the meeting on 31 March 2022.

Any Other Business

Council membership

2021.037 This was the last Council meeting for Luke Savage and David Willis who were completing their second terms. The Chair thanked them on behalf of Council for their exemplary contributions to the university.

Dates of Meetings 2021–22

- Thursday 31 March 2022, 1600 hours, Colette Bowe Room, Mile End.
- Thursday 19 May / Friday 20 May 2022 – Residential conference including Council meeting.
- Thursday 07 July 2022, 1600 hours, Colette Bowe Room, Mile End.