

CONFIRMED

LIVERPOOL HOPE UNIVERSITY

UNIVERSITY COUNCIL ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING: 22nd November 2023

PRESENT: Revd Canon Peter Winn (in the Chair), Mrs Jane Beever (Vice-Chair), Mr Tim Alderman, Dr Edwin Djabatey, Revd Canon Chris Fallon, Revd Geoff Felton, Dr Penny Haughan, Very Revd Dr Sue Jones, Fr Chris McCoy, Ms Lesley Martin-Wright, Ms Neve Rosser, Professor Atulya Nagar, Mr John Norbury, Prof C Ozanne, Rt Revd Dr John Perumbalath, Ms Paula Raper, Mrs Maggie Swinson, Mr Steven Townley, Professor Caroline Wakefield
(19 members)

By invitation: Mr Derrick Dykins (Clerk to Council), Ms Sue Beecroft (items 7 and 8) and Mr Aaron Porter (Advance HE)

No Conflicts of Interest were reported.

1. **Apologies for absence** were received from Ms Deborah Shackleton and HH Judge Graham Wood KC.

2. **Minutes of previous meetings**

The minutes of the meetings held on 5th July 2023 and 20th September 2023 (Reflective Meeting) were **APPROVED** as a correct record, though members agreed that the minutes of the Reflective Meeting could be amended slightly to indicate the length and depth of the discussion with students and demonstrate the engagement Council members had with them.

Action: Mr Dykins to amend the minutes

3. **Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising that were not included elsewhere on the agenda.

4. **Vice-Chancellor's Notes to Council**

Members had received the Vice Chancellor's Notes to Council which were presented by Prof Ozanne. She highlighted Project 2028, which launches a number of initiatives designed to help address the budget deficit. Each workstream is led by a senior member of the University with the aim of diversifying income. The key areas of focus are around student recruitment and retention, and already Departments have put in a great deal of effort with additional initiatives to ensure that current students are supported and engaged. This includes a campaign to reach out to students who have particular issues they want resolving. In addition to Study Abroad opportunities in Spring, there will be a further student recruitment opportunity in January and February, mainly for PG students, and the DfE have also granted a PGCE start in January, all of which look very promising. On Research income, Prof Nagar is working with Departments to bring in additional income via grant submissions. Prof Ozanne also noted the focus on corporate wellbeing as well as using the University estate effectively by bringing income for student camps onto campus plus different models to deliver short courses.

CONFIRMED

Prof Ozanne said in order to reduce costs the University has sent details of a voluntary severance scheme today which will offer 7 months' salary as an inducement. The scheme is open for applications to 4th January and will only be available to those where there is a cost saving.

Prof Ozanne highlighted the effort that staff put in before the summer to ensure that all students were able to graduate with their full awards. Given the industrial unrest in the sector this was a major achievement. Currently there is no strike action or action-short-of-a-strike planned. Going forward, she said that early indicators suggested that recruitment for September 2024 is down across the sector, though the University has managed to increase its PGCE and international applications.

Other highlights since the last Council meeting include the completion of a number of External reviews which had been commissioned, and the award of TEF Silver in both categories (University Outcomes and Student Experience). The University is also focusing on improving the staff experience using a staff survey which will be benchmarked.

Dean Sue Jones queried whether voluntary severance might be a destabilising factor, and Prof Ozanne acknowledged that this was a risk but said that the scheme was voluntary and no staff in critical roles will be eligible to apply. Dr Haughan is in close contact with all Heads of Schools/Departments who are managing the process. The University has been open and transparent about the financial situation that has prompted this move. UCU have been told that the University needs to save in excess of £1m from the scheme, which equates to approximately 14 members of staff, dependent upon where those who apply are on the pay scale.

Members also noted a change in the regulations to accept a lower second undergraduate result for postgraduate applications. Prof Ozanne said that this was the sector norm. Members said that all the initiatives in Project 2028 have relevance to the finances of the University and the focus was very encouraging.

5. The Strategic Plan and KPIs

Members had received the final draft of the Strategic Plan, accompanied by a proposed set of KPIs. Prof Ozanne presented an overview of the pillars behind the Plan, explaining the process and how these have evolved during the consultation period with a wide range of stakeholders.

In no particular order, there are five interlinked pillars to the Plan. The Ethos and Community pillar ensures that the mission and values of the University underpin objectives and actions. For the Education pillar there are key phrases and words which aim to support the student, such as confidence and resilience, which align with Hope graduate attributes. The pillar ensures that widening participation is an objective, and that the University's portfolio of programmes is relevant to the needs and wants of our student. Graduate attributes are engendered via a high-quality learning and teaching environment and achieved by working in partnership with students.

The Research, Scholarship and Knowledge Exchange pillar aspires to give a higher profile to Knowledge Exchange which is concerned with how we interact with external partners and foster interdisciplinarity between colleagues. Also included is the aim of increasing external funding to expand our research. The Partnership and Voice pillar aims to increase the University's profile in the community and contribute to setting and delivering the priorities of the region by forging links with education, business and research partnerships, as well as increasing the University profile nationally and internationally. The final pillar is sustainability,

CONFIRMED

both in terms of the financial future of the University, and a commitment to environmental sustainability in terms of carbon reduction and stewardship.

The Plan and KPIs had been approved by USET and Senate, and Prof Ozanne explained how the KPIs are expressed differently, firstly as objectives which are externally facing and then as a set of metrics to enable Council to monitor progress. There are also supporting strategies: the Learning & Teaching Strategy was approved in July; the Research, Scholarship and Knowledge Exchange (RS&KE) Strategy was approved at Senate earlier in November; and the People Strategy, the Digital Strategy and the Estates Strategy are currently being developed for approval in the Spring.

Members considered whether the KPIs present were appropriate and discussed these in detail. After some discussion, it was agreed that these were suitable as progress towards these could all be measured via annual targets. Prof Ozanne confirmed that the next step is to create an action plan beneath each target, which would include costs and finance profiles. Members queried how these aligned with the University's risk register; Prof Ozanne said that next steps included tying these closely to the register.

Ms Martin-Wright said she was heartened to be involved in the development of the Plan and KPIs as a stakeholder. The Combined Authority can be involved externally. Mr Norbury said that he expected there to be scrutiny at a more granular level as the Plan progressed. There will be an alignment of School strategic documents managed within each School to ensure Heads understand how staff are contributing to the Strategy. Prof Ozanne confirmed that there had been a great deal of enthusiasm for the Strategy.

Members **APPROVED** the Strategic Plan and KPIs.

6. Clerk's Business:

(i) Register of Interests

The Clerk reminded members of the necessity to ensure a complete register of interests and how to complete their submission online.

(ii) Schedule of Business

Members had received the Schedule for information.

(iii) Governance Review Update

Mr Dykins introduced Mr Porter from Advance HE, the appointed consultants undertaking the governance review. Mr Porter was present to observe the meeting as part of the review. A meeting will be convened in February to present the findings of the review and agree recommendations and an action plan.

(iv) Committee Terms of Reference and Composition

Members had received the ToR for information. Mr Dykins highlighted issues with recruitment of Council members.

(v) Sexual Misconduct

CONFIRMED

Dr Haughan reported that, in line with the statement in the Annual Report on Student Matters (item 7ii), the University continues to have a very low number of cases, but that robust processes are in place to deal with incidents. She highlighted the internal audit in this area that concluded before the summer which gave substantial assurance that processes were operating effectively. Mr Dykins noted that auditors had been asked whether there was any evidence of underreporting, but they felt that the University was doing all it could to encourage reporting in an appropriate manner. Since September there had been one instance of misconduct reported which had involved the police and resulted in a student being suspended while the investigation was ongoing, with extensive support provided to the reporting party.

(vi) Data Protection Policy

Members had received the revised Data Protection Policy.

Members **APPROVED** the Policy.

(vii) Prevent Annual Report

Members had received the Annual Report, which comprised a summary, the most recent risk assessment from earlier in November, the Return for the OfS and the Accountability Declaration (ADR). Mr Dykins noted the low participation rate in training over the last year and had discussed this with the Staff Development advisor who has already put in measures to ensure that relevant staff are either doing induction or refresher training.

Members **APPROVED** the Report and ADR.

(viii) Transfer of Land and dissolving Urban Hope

Mr Dykins confirmed that, following the request for approval for the transfer of former Kensington Reservoir site to Park Options via email the **RESOLUTION WAS PASSED**. Once the transfer is finalised, Urban Hope can be dissolved.

7. Senate

(i) Minutes of the meeting held on 8th November 2023

Members had received the minutes of the meeting held on 8th November 2023 for information. Prof Ozanne highlighted the approval of the RS&KE Strategy. She also explained the discussion of the Degree classification algorithm whereby the University has operated two algorithms in parallel, though in order to follow best practice the University will be moving to a single algorithm.

(ii) Annual Report on Student Complaints, Appeals and Discipline

Members had received for information the Annual Report on Student Complaints, Appeals and Discipline. Mr Dykins noted that this encompassed Academic Appeals and highlighted the amount of work that went into ensuring that all such student matters were taken seriously and properly investigated.

(iii) Introduction of Faculties: Outcome of Staff Consultation

Members had received for information the outcome of a consultation regarding moving to a faculty-based structure. The consultation was initiated as it was felt that the attempt

CONFIRMED

to devolve responsibilities to the current 10 Schools/Departments had resulted in an imbalance in administrative support for different areas, and a lack of interdisciplinarity. The administrative and bureaucratic burden had also increased and it was felt that a faculty structure would help to alleviate many of these issues. The consultation had involved all academic and relevant support staff over recent months with the result that four faculties had been agreed. There will be no new appointments within the structure.

The naming of Faculties gave rise to most debate during the consultation but it was agreed that, once appointed, the Dean of each Faculty will decide on the name. It was confirmed that redundancies are factored into the structure but that this is a separate issue and does not form part of the rationale for the consultation. The structure will give more leadership opportunities for staff who currently do not have these. Members queried whether there was any evidence of “change fatigue” but the Vice Chancellor reassured member that this was not the case and that consultation responses were generally very positive. There remains a challenge to ensure that the senior layer below Deans (subject lead etc.) works effectively but there will be horizontal leadership consistency, with Associate Deans forming a committee with the intention of adding a student representative and possibly an external member of Council to their membership.

Members **ENDORSED** the new Faculty Structure.

8. Finance and General Purposes Committee

(i) Presentation on Finance

Ms Beecroft attended for this item and gave a presentation on financial results from 2022-23 and on the forecast for 2023-34. Last year the University had delivered a surplus of 4% with cash reserves at £29.1m. However, a combination of static home fees against a backdrop of a downturn in students taking up university offers (including for teaching training), lower continuer numbers and staff and utilities cost increases creates a significant financial challenge for the University. Council have already agreed a deficit of just over £2m to enable the University to reposition itself, and Project 2028 is already underway to go some way to address this, with a detailed five-year plan underway to include growth targets. The University has also already launched a voluntary severance (VS) scheme.

It was noted that a range of universities are in a similar position, and the international market which has traditionally helped to bolster university finances is also struggling with changes in student visa requirements. It was hoped that much of the deficit could be addressed by the individual projects which make up Project 2028, but there is still likely to be a shortfall. A new government next year would not necessarily give additional funds directly, but there could be other assistance in terms of support for students which universities are currently struggling with. There will be an update on finances in March which will capture some of the savings from the VS scheme and initiatives included in Project 2028, but at the moment this cannot be quantified with any accuracy.

Dean Sue Jones asked whether these changes required formal approval by Council as they suggested a move beyond the original deficit agreed by Council. Mr Norbury explained that, at this stage, the details were provided for information.

(ii) Minutes of the meeting held on 31st October 2023

Members had received the minutes of the meeting held on 31st October 2023 which were presented by Mr Norbury as Chair.

CONFIRMED

(iii) Financial Report and Accounts for the Year Ended 31st July 2023

Members had received the Report and Accounts for the year ended 31st July 2023. Mr Norbury noted that the final version had been delayed, but that there was nothing unexpected in the statements as forecasts had been received throughout the year.

The Report and Accounts were **FORMALLY ADOPTED** by Council.

(iv) Bank Loan Covenant Change

Members had received details as to why the breach of the Barclays bank loan covenant occurred, the steps taken and implications for the Audit Report. The report outlined the new covenants being proposed and the approach agreed with the auditors to avoid delays with issuing the audit opinion.

Members **APPROVED** the approach agreed with the auditors.

9. Audit and Risk Management

(i) Minutes of the meeting of Audit Committee held on 13th September and 2nd November 2023

Members had received the minutes of the meetings held on 13th September and 2nd November 2023 which were presented by the Chair, Mr Townley who had recently joined Council. He thanked his predecessor, Dr Naylor, for his service and the handover he had received. He highlighted the ongoing review of the circumstances surrounding the fraud at the Students' Union (SU). He confirmed that there was no reputational damage to the University, nor any permanent financial loss, and that appropriate action had been taken but that the Committee was awaiting the final update. Mr Townley also noted the close monitoring of the risk register and the effort that had been put in to improve the layout of the register. ITT accreditation had also been under close scrutiny by the Committee, and members were satisfied that the accreditation was on the right track. He reiterated the auditors' opinion that "the organisation has an adequate and effective framework for risk management, governance, internal control and economy, efficiency and effectiveness", noting that their "work has identified further enhancements to the framework for risk management, governance, internal control and economy, efficiency and effectiveness to ensure that it remains adequate and effective."

(ii) External Auditors' Management Letter on the Accounts

Members had received the Management Letter from the University's external auditors.

Members **APPROVED** the External Auditors' Management Letter on the Accounts.

(iii) Representation Letter

Members had received the Representation Letter to the External Auditors which confirmed that Council has fulfilled its responsibilities.

Members **APPROVED** the Representation Letter.

(iv) Risk Management Policy

CONFIRMED

Members had received this new policy, which had arisen out of the audit on Risk Management. Not only does the policy give a clear context for the University's approach to risk management, but it also sets out the University's appetite for risk. It was noted that the University had given a high score for its appetite in relation to academic matters, in order to reflect the University's approach to being creative and innovative in making its portfolio more attractive to applicants. Health & Safety remains a low risk.

Members **APPROVED** the Risk Management Policy.

(v) Risk Register

Members had received the risk register for information.

(vi) Annual Report of the Internal Audit Service 2022-23

Members had received the Annual Report of the Internal Audit Service. Mr Townley noted that the report identified further enhancements but that most of the recommendations have already been implemented or are well under way to.

The Annual Report of the Internal Audit Service was **APPROVED** by Council.

(vii) Annual Report of the Audit Committee 2022-23

Members had received the Annual Report of the Audit Committee which summarised the work over the academic year 2022/23.

The Annual Report of the Audit Committee was **APPROVED** by Council.

(viii) Modern Slavery Statement

Mr Dykins noted that the statement was based on the same template that had been used for several years. The statement is taken very seriously and is imbedded within operational considerations, though next year the intention is to make the statement more focussed and to make it more of a best practice model. Members queried whether, for example, the purchase of the sports kit by the SU was covered by this, but it was confirmed that, due to their independence and size the SU are not required to adhere to producing a statement.

Members **APPROVED** the Modern Slavery Statement.

10. Staffing Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 24th October 2023

Members had received the minutes of the meeting held on 24th October 2023 which were presented by the Chair of the Committee, Mrs Swinson. She noted that while there was a great deal of industrial unrest in the sector which had some impact on the University, the work of staff in ensuring that Hope students graduated with a final classification should be commended. She also said that that the Committee had spent a substantial amount of time reviewing the move to Faculties and the implications this might have for staff.

11. Council Standing Committee on Health and Safety

(i) Minutes of the meeting held on 26th October 2023

CONFIRMED

Members had received the minutes of the meeting held on 26th October 2023 which were presented by Fr Fallon. He noted the statement on RAAC, and that there had been three different reviews, including external surveyors, but that there was not any evidence of any issues. However, a further independent estate-wide survey has been instructed to provide complete assurance. In terms of Student Support services and mental health, the last year saw a decrease in services which could be due to less anxiety previously caused by lockdown and covid.

(ii) Annual Report 2022-23

The Annual Report was received for information.

12. Students' Union President's Report

Members had received the Report. Ms Rosser highlighted part-time recruitment, including the SU Communities role which is already making good progress, and a new student trustee for international. There are a number of staff with medical issues which mean that others are covering for them in their absence, delaying plans to align the SU strategic plan with that of the University. However, this will be addressed when staff return. Policy work is ongoing for staffing.

Events organised by the SU so far in Term 1 include Black History Month and mental health awareness activities. There have been training events covering a wide range of critical areas and multiple partnerships have been formed with external charities to support students with sexual health needs, including setting up temporary clinics at Hope Park; this will be extended to Creative Campus in the New Year. The VP Welfare is also working hard to ensure the success of the Nightline facility, which will be relaunched after Christmas with a new cohort of trained volunteers.

The VP Academic has co-led a Community of Practice around inclusivity which included a pilot study prior to a full launch of a checklist to be used within all Schools and Departments. He has also been involved in running the University's neurodiversity group which aims to break down barriers to support. Sabbatical Officers attended the Liverpool Trans Pride March with a vigil for trans pride awareness. The SU also took part in the Bank of New York's graduate engagement day which should be the start of a good relationship that could reap benefits for graduate careers.

Members noted that eating disorders are very high amongst young women and Ms Rosser said she would look into this. She said that there will be individual campaigns for Women's History Month in March.

13. Senior Remuneration Committee Report

Dr Haughan, Prof Nagar and Professor Ozanne left the meeting for this item.

Members had received the Report from the Senior Remuneration Committee for the Senior Team which was chaired by the Vice Chair of Council. The Vice Chancellor had reported on Senior Staff and although she gave a glowing report of work over that past year with clear commitment to their role it was agreed that there would be no uplift on salaries this year as every senior member of staff had said prior to the meeting that they would not accept an uplift given the current climate.

CONFIRMED

Similarly, the Remuneration Committee for the Vice Chancellor concluded that, since her start in March she had shown exemplary leadership and performed outstandingly. It was felt that she was deserving of an uplift on salary but again, she had made it clear she would not accept any increase.

Members noted the generosity of senior staff and the Vice Chancellor. It was suggested that differentials in salary should be reviewed and benchmarked to ensure that the University is in keeping with the sector. Members were heartened by the report but said that the University needed to ensure that increases are linked to results.

14. Dates for Future Meetings: can be found [here](#)