

BISHOP GROSSETESTE UNIVERSITY

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE UNIVERSITY COUNCIL

WEDNESDAY 18 DECEMBER 2024
11 AM IN CSH11 & 12 and VIA MS TEAMS

Present

Alison Brown
Russ Coulter
Dr Stephen Critchley
Rebecca Crooks
Tom Dannatt
Anne Frost (*Chair*)
Stephen Galjaard
Prof. Marianne Howarth
Rev'd Canon Dr Sarah Lawrence
Dr Sacha Mason
Rachel McLafferty
Rebecca Midgley
Jaidip Sen
Elise Temple
Kate Truscott

In attendance

Leanne Chancellor, Head of the Vice-Chancellor's Office
Jonathan Cheeseman, Director of Corporate Services (Item 9)
Craig Ferguson, Secretariat, Alumni Relations and Ceremonial Officer (*Minutes*)
Dr Nick Gee, Executive Dean of Faculty
Kym Gill, Students' Union Vice President: Education
Amy Hare, Head of Finance (Items 1 to 8)
Allison Webb, Director of Business and Community Engagement (Item 11)

		Action
1.	Welcome	
1.1	The Chair, Anne Frost, welcomed members to the second University Council Meeting of the 2024/25 academic year.	
1.2	The Chair formally welcomed to the meeting the new Diocesan Representative, Rachel McLafferty (RMc).	
2.	The University Prayer	
2.1	The Chair invited Rev'd Canon Dr Sarah Lawrence (SL) to lead the University Prayer.	
3.	Apologies	
3.1	Apologies for absence were RECEIVED from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Julia Chippendale; 	

- Bishop Stephen Conway;
- Max Gordon;
- Rev'd Canon Simon Jones; and
- Walter Leschenko.

4. **Declarations of interest**

4.1 There were no new declarations of interest.

5. **Minutes of Previous Meeting – 22 November 2024**

5.1 The minutes of the University Council Meeting held on 22 November 2024 were APPROVED as a true and accurate record of the meeting and the Chair was authorised to sign them.

6. **Matters Arising**

6.1 Action Table

6.1.1 Members RECEIVED the action table from 22 November 2024 and progress against actions was NOTED.

6.2 Any other matters

6.2.1 There were no other matters arising.

7. **Critical Path 2 Update**

7.1 Members RECEIVED and NOTED the Critical Path 2 (CP2) Update.

7.2 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Operations) & University Secretary, Tom Dannatt (TD) HIGHLIGHTED the following key pointes to NOTE:

- BGU was 50% of the way through CP2.
- There had been a reduction of income of £1.5m for the Student Village due to lower than projected occupancy levels.
- Occupancy level projections were being reviewed for 2025/26, with the target occupancy dropping from 90% to 60%.
- The following actions had been taken to mitigate the reduction in income:
 - Utilisation of a £400k provision which had been included in the budget.
 - Approx. £350k of commercial activity had been secured relating to the Student Village.
 - A 5% saving from non-pay budgets, equating to £400k had been made.
- Lower Tuition Fee income from BGU students had been mitigated by work with ICON College and The Language Gallery.
- Consultation on the name change closed on 4 December 2024 with a response from the OfS anticipated by the end of February 2025.
- There had been a visit by Universities UK on 12 December which had been productive for all involved.
- Funding had been secured to develop and deliver in-house staff development and training sessions.

Elise Temple joined the meeting.

7.3 Members RAISED the following questions and comments:

- Why was there such a significant variance in projected vs actual accommodation occupancy figures?
 - TD NOTED that the variance was due to lower undergraduate enrolments in 2024/25.
- Could there be a review of the accommodation projections to improve future planning cycles?
 - TD CONFIRMED that a review of the accommodation projections could be undertaken.
- How many additional partnership students were required to mitigate the impact of lower income?
 - TD NOTED that this would be investigated further with a report presented to Council at a future meeting.
- What impact would a reduction in student rent have on finances and occupancy levels?
 - TD NOTED that this would be addressed under Item 9 of the agenda.
 - TD NOTED that applications for accommodation were being opened earlier than in previous years.
- How many additional partnership students were required to fully mitigate the lower tuition fee income from BGU students?
 - TD NOTED that this would be investigated further with a brief report provided for members.

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7.4 The Executive Dean of Faculty, Dr Nick Gee (NG), HIGHLIGHTED the following key points to NOTE relating to the outsourcing of International Student Recruitment:

- There had been explorations of outsourcing International Student Recruitment and Admissions processes.
- There had been a period of growth in international student numbers, followed by a decline over the previous two years and therefore a new approach was required.
- There was increased competition across the sector to recruit international students.
- A tender process was established for specialist organisations to bid for the contract.
- Eight tenders were received from a range of organisations.
- A panel of key stakeholders from across BGU reviewed all tender applications, followed by presentations from each organisation.
- Following all presentations, the panel determined that the preferred organisation was Oxford International Education.
 - The recommendation for Oxford International Education was approved by the University Executive Group.
- A contract was being negotiated whilst a full due diligence process was completed.

7.5 Members RAISED the following questions and comments:

- At what stage was the commission fee payable?
 - NG NOTED BGU would pay 30% of the fee for the first 99 students who enrol, which would be payable at the point of enrolment.
- Would the Admissions Team work on any International Applications once a contract has been signed?
 - TD NOTED that members of the Admissions Team currently focused on International Admissions would focus on UK Admissions.
- Was the percentage fee based on the students first year, or each year they are enrolled at BGU?

- The Head of Finance, Amy Hare (AH), CONFIRMED that the fee was based on the first year only.
- If a student enrolled and subsequently withdrew, were they still required to pay fees and was BGU still required to pay fees to the agency?
 - NG NOTED that a 'cooling off' period would be included in the contract to address this.
- Was the intention to recruit international students to specific programmes?
 - NG NOTED it was the intention to recruit international students to existing programmes and that Oxford International were aware of the portfolio developments being proposed.
- Members REQUESTED a further update on Outsourcing International Student Recruitment at a future University Council once details had been confirmed.

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8. Financial Forecast

8.1 Members RECEIVED and NOTED the Financial Forecast, including the Office for Students (OfS) Workbook and Commentary.

8.2 TD HIGHLIGHTED the following key points to NOTE:

- The OfS Workbook and Commentary were due for submission by 6 January 2025.
- The figures within the OfS Workbook represented the latest forecast outline for the current year.
- The figures provided within the OfS Workbook and Commentary aligned with the Q2 Management Accounts.

8.3 Members RAISED the following questions and comments:

- Could assurance be provided that the forecast surpluses in the OfS Workbook and the Management Accounts reconcile against one another?
 - TD CONFIRMED this could be included in the next set of Management Accounts.

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8.4 Members were CONTENT to delegate final completion and submission of the OfS Workbook and Commentary to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Operations) & University Secretary.

The Head of Finance, Amy Hare, left the meeting.

The Director of Corporate Services, Jonathan Cheeseman, joined the meeting.

9. Update on Accommodation Plan for 2025/2026

9.1 Members RECEIVED and NOTED the updated on the Accommodation Plan for 2025/2026.

9.2 The Director of Corporate Services, Jonathan Cheeseman (JC) HIGHLIGHTED the following key points to NOTE:

- The Accommodation Portfolio consisted of:
 - Constance Stewart Hall (CSH) (91 beds).
 - Student Village (293 beds).
 - Wickham Hall (126 beds).
 - Longdales Lodge.
- There were 58 beds in the Student Village which were occupied.

- Work was underway to implement mitigating actions to address occupancy levels and lower income for the Student Village.
- The focus for 2025/26 was retention of students currently staying in accommodation.
- The following incentives were being explored to improve retention:
 - A three-year fixed rental price.
 - £150 university catering vouchers for students who stay in university accommodation after their first year.
- The rent for Wickham Hall for 2025/26 had been increased by 5%, to £154 per week (on a 46-week contract).
- At the end of 2025/26, the break clause in the lease agreement for Longdales Lodge will be used.

9.3 Members RAISED the following questions and comments:

- Following the use of the break clause for Longdales Lodge, would all accommodation be owned by BGU?
 - JC NOTED that Wickham Hall and the Student Village would not be owned by BGU (as they are now under lease arrangements), but that CSH would be owned by BGU.
- What was the historic approach of students after their first year in relation to accommodation?
 - JC NOTED that students had typically moved into privately rented accommodation after their first year.
- Was the uptake of accommodation linked to geographical recruitment?
 - The Chair NOTED that this analysis had been requested and would be presented to FE&GP at their next meeting.
- Members NOTED that it would be beneficial to receive figures relating to the supply and demand of the accommodation portfolio.

Jonathan Cheeseman left the meeting.

The Director of Business & Community Engagement, Allison Webb, joined the meeting.

10. Portfolio Review Update

10.1 Members RECEIVED and NOTED the Portfolio Review Update.

10.2 NG HIGHLIGHTED the following key points to NOTE:

- A number of proposals had been reviewed, with five main priorities emerging from the review. These were:
 - The Current Portfolio.
 - Postgraduate Core Pathway.
 - Undergraduate Core Pathway.
 - Online Delivery.
 - Health and Social Care.
- There had been a review of the existing portfolio offer to improve portfolio sustainability, enrolments and delivery of content.
- Modelling had been completed to determine a benchmark for the minimum number of students required on an Undergraduate programme to ensure financial viability.
- Action Plans were in place for courses that were not recruiting the minimum numbers of students.

- A core and pathway structure had been proposed for Postgraduate Taught Programmes, which build on an 'Education' subject focus.
- Efficiencies around the co-teaching of core modules on Undergraduate programmes.
- Online Delivery had been identified as an area for growth, with a number of options for delivery being explored.
- Health and Social Care was a new portfolio area which was being developed.

10.3

Members RAISED the following questions and comments:

- Which student data projections were being used to predict demand of programmes?
 - NG NOTED that demand for programmes at Level 4 could be predicted from data evaluating the uptake of GCSE and A-Level programmes.
- Members NOTED that they were content with the work that had been completed on the Portfolio Review so far.

11. Partnerships Update

11.1 Members RECEIVED and NOTED the Partnerships Update.

11.2 The Director of Business and Community Engagement, Allison Webb (AW) HIGHLIGHTED the following key points to NOTE:

- The Vision for Partnerships.
- A Partnerships Governance Structure which would need to be implemented.
- The income trends for ICON College and The Language Gallery.
- Three Academic Partnership Metrics had been identified to ensure successful partnership arrangements, which were:
 - Governance and Operations.
 - Student numbers, data quality and finance.
 - Academic quality, standards; student success and student experience.

11.3 Members RAISED the following questions and comments:

- How was consideration given to the portfolio BGU is developing is also being delivered by our partners?
 - AW NOTED that there were opportunities to work collaboratively with partners and it would be beneficial for University Council to be regularly updated with any developments.
 - NG HIGHLIGHTED that it was important that the portfolio offer from our partners aligned with BGU's Mission and Purpose.
- It was NOTED that progress updates relating to partnerships were reported to University Council via the Academic Assurance Committee.

Allison Webb left the meeting.

12. Reportable Events

12.1 Since the last University Council meeting on 22 November 2024 to the present meeting (18 December 2024), it was NOTED that there have been no Reportable Events to the OfS.

Signed  Date 01 - 04 - 2025