

**COUNCIL MINUTES
MEETING HELD ON 12th FEBRUARY 2021**

Members		Meeting 1 09.10.20	Meeting 2 27.11.20	Meeting 3 12.02.21	Meeting 4 26.03.21	Meeting 5 14.05.21	Meeting 6 02.07.21
Independent Members	Ms Julia Palca (Chair)	✓	✓	✓			
	Professor Sir Paul Curran (President)	✓	✓	✓			
	Ms Kru Desai	✓	✓	✓			
	Dr Paula Franklin	✓	✓	✓			
	Mr Simon Harding-Roots	✓	✓	✓			
	Mr Adrian Haxby	✓	✓	✓			
	Ms Philippa Hird	✓	✓	✓			
	Professor Chris Jenks	✓	✓	✓			
	Mr Thomas Lee-Warren	✓	✓	A			
	Dr Andrew Mackintosh	✓	✓	✓			
	Ms Ebele Okobi	N/M	N/M	✓			
	Mr Anant Prakash	N/M	N/M	✓			
	Ms Jen Tippin	A	✓	✓			
	Mr Ron Zeghibe	✓	✓	✓			
Staff and Student Members	Ms Mary Luckiram	✓	✓	✓			
	Mr Saqlain Riaz	✓	✓	✓			
	Ms Liz Rylatt	✓	✓	✓			
	Professor Debra Salmon	✓	✓	✓			

Key: ✓ In Attendance A Apologies P Part Attendance N/M Not a Member S Sabbatical

In Attendance	Reason and Meeting Section
Mr James Birkett	Director of Registry and Student Services (Item 8)
Professor David Bolton	Deputy President & Provost (DP&P)
Professor Anthony Finkelstein	President-elect
Professor Andrew Jones	Interim Deputy President (IDP)
Professor Juliet John	Dean of the School of Arts and Social Sciences (Item 13)
Dr William Jordan	College Secretary (CS)
Ms Sarah Lawton	Governance Administrator
Professor Zoe Radnor	Vice-President, Strategy and Planning (VP, S&P)
Professor Raj Roy	Dean of SMCSE (Item 13)
Professor Andrew Stockley	Dean of the City Law School (Item 13)
Professor Paolo Volpin	Dean of the Business School

MINUTES SECTION A – OPEN FOR PUBLICATION

Part One – Preliminary Items

- Highlighted Items**
Council **agreed** the highlighted items.
- Minutes**
The minutes of the meeting held on 27th November 2020 were approved.
- Matters Arising**
Council noted the table of actions arising from past meetings.

USS Update

The HR Director gave a verbal update, noting that the pace of developments was being set by the USS 2020 valuation outcomes and statutory deadline of 30th June 2021.

The USS Trustee would shortly be issuing the 'Rule 76.1 Report' to the USS Joint Negotiating Committee. This would contain the proposed contribution rates, given the current level of covenant support and prior to any possible benefit reform. UUK would

then consult with employers. The consultation material and City's draft response would be shared with Council for its steer. **[Action]**

USS continued to discuss the valuation with the Pensions Regulator. The most recent update from USS suggested that the funding position had deteriorated since the valuation date of March 2020.

The 2018 valuation set contributions which included deficit reduction in relation to existing pension commitments. This included a second significant rise in contributions to take effect from 1st October 2021. However, deterioration in the funding position was likely to result in much higher contribution rates for employers and employees being proposed in the Rule 76.1 Report. It was likely that benefit reform would be necessary if current contribution rates were not to increase further.

The HR Director was in discussion with the CFO and Director of Marketing about effective communication with staff, in order to provide them with a fuller understanding of the funding challenge. This was likely to include a series of workshops presented by Mercer.

JNCHES 2020 Pay Uplift

UCU and UNISON were consulting their members on a motion to enter into dispute and/or take industrial action over the outcome of the 2020 JNCHES national negotiations, which resulted in a 0% uplift to salaries. The consultation with employers on the 2021 JNCHES round has just begun.

The Chair noted that it would be useful for SIPCo and/or RemCo to begin to consider the UUK consultation proposals on the USS as soon as available and ahead of Council consideration. **[Action]**

4. Conflicts of Interest

The President noted that he was a member of the USS Ltd. Board; and had therefore declared an interest in Item 3 (above).

5. Items Specially Brought Forward by the Chair

Welcome

The Chair welcomed Ebele Okobi and Anant Prakash to their first meeting as Independent Council Members.

Student Recruitment Numbers Update

Undergraduate:

- The demographic dip was ending and an increase starting, of 3% pa nationally and more than that in London.
- The current target, 4,000, would be modified during planning.
- More than 23,000 applications had been received by the extended January 29th deadline. Applications at City were up by 9%, which is 2% above the national average.
- Home applications constituted 76% of applications. EU applications were down from 9% to 6% of total applications as a result of Brexit-related fee increases. International applications remained steady at 18% of the total.
- All Schools apart from the Business School had increases in applications. The Business School was affected by lower levels of EU and international applications from some key markets.
- Offer processing and conversion activity was underway.

Postgraduate:

- The current target, 4,625, would be modified during the planning and budgeting process.
- Normally City would have received 25-30% of applications by now and had so far received ~6,500 applications (6% down on 2020, 13% up on 2019).

- Applications from China were down by ~40%, from 1,400 to 800.
- There had been little change in EU applications as fees were unregulated in the Postgraduate Taught market.
- Offer processing and conversion was underway.

Trade Unions Meeting

The Chair of Council's annual meeting with Union representatives was scheduled to take place on Wednesday 17th February and the discussions would include insourcing of cleaning and catering staff; cost saving; the new President; and current leadership. Council members were welcome to attend.

Meeting with Senior Elected Senators

The Chair had met with Senior Elected Senators to discuss student satisfaction and noted that a set of complex issues were discussed which included perceived weaknesses in processes and technology. A discussion paper, which had been requested by Senate from the Senior Elected Senator would be presented at the March meeting of Senate. If Council members would like a copy they should inform the College Secretary. **[Action]**

6. Council Calendar

Council noted the calendar and that online meetings would continue until at least the end of March. The Away Day would take place on 14th May, ideally "in person", but virtually if not.

7. Report from the President on National Developments

The President gave a verbal update and in discussion the following points were noted:

- *DfE undergraduate fees*: DfE had frozen the undergraduate fee for 2021/22. The upcoming response to the Augar Review would include updates on the proposed 2022/23 undergraduate fee, undergraduate financing more broadly, minimum entry requirements and financial treatment of foundation years.
- *OfS Teaching Grant (renamed Strategic Priorities Grant)*: 2021/22 had seen a funding increase of £11M but behind the small net figure there was considerable change: (i) an increase of £85M for STEM and healthcare; (ii) a decrease of £20M for performing/creative arts, media studies and archaeology; (iii) and an end to the £64M London Weighting. The net effect was a 13.7% decrease in Teaching Grant in London (£2.7M for City) and London universities were challenging this.
- *OfS Student Hardship funding*: OfS had announced £20M last term and £50M this term with City allocations of £83k and £221k, respectively. The Student Experience Task & Finish Group 2020/21 would distribute these welcome funds with priority given to student accommodation. To put them into perspective, together they are an average of £15 per head. Lobbying would begin for a larger sum for term three.
- *OfS Education*: (i) OfS would not be introducing a subject-level TEF and would consult on an institution-wide streamlined exercise every 4-5 years and classify institutions into four categories; (ii) OfS would be consulting on Post-Qualifications Admissions system designed around offers after results.
- *Horizon Europe programme*: The UK had become an associate member of Horizon Europe, the scheme that has provided around a fifth of City's research grant funding. The UK funding level would be in the budget on 3rd March.
- *Current pandemic issues*: There were concerns about student loneliness, the impracticality of offering significant catch-up learning over the summer, the low-level of student testing and the need to get students back on campus. City awaited the government announcement on 22nd February on its plans for easing lockdown in the higher education sector.

- *Secretary of State's letter to incoming OfS Chair:* There were indications that the government was ceasing to position OfS as an independent, arms-length, regulator and as seeing it rather as a political and interventionist regulator. The letter from the Secretary of State to the incoming OfS Chair set out the direction of travel the government wished OfS to take for the next few years. Government priorities included: more support for student mental health and white boys from working class backgrounds, more emphasis on geography rather than protected characteristics and a risk-based approach to quality and standards.

James Birkett joined the meeting.

8. Students' Union Report

Council received a verbal update from the SU President and in discussion the following points were noted:

- Since entering the third lock-down, students were running out of patience with, e.g., the lack of face-to-face teaching. Students had also raised concern about their graduation ceremonies.
- The SU continued to receive queries and complaints, largely about tuition fees, and mostly from international students. The SU and students continued to lobby the Government and the student loan companies on these matters.

SU Statement on Student Accommodation Rent Strike

Council noted the SU statement and the supplementary paper from the DP&P and Director of Registry & Student Services (*Accommodation at City, Unite Rent Strike & OfS Hardship Funding*). In discussion the following points were noted:

- The rent strike statement and motion had been passed at the Student Council meeting and the SU felt it was important for Council to have sight of it and to note the frustration felt by students with regard to the perceived failings of the UNITE accommodation provider.
- As noted at Item 7, the DfE had announced funding to help students facing financial difficulties arising from the impact of Covid and the SU President would like to see City's procedures for students to access the funding relaxed to remove some of the bureaucracy around the process.
- The role of Council on this matter was to check to see that the Executive was engaging successfully with the issues raised; and to seek assurance that the outcome would be one that was fair to all City's students and not just the minority who lived in halls.
- The Executive would provide an update on the issues at the next meeting of Council. **[Action]**

James Birkett left the meeting.

Part Two – Major Items for Discussion or Decision

9. Coronavirus: Update

Council received a verbal update and the following points were noted:

- City's Covid Campus Management Group continued to meet weekly. The Group considered guidance from Public Health England regularly and the Group would continue to monitor and act on the latest advice.
- 'Keep City Safe Ambassadors' were on campus to support compliance with Covid safety guidelines and were reported to be having a positive impact.
- The number of staff and students on site remained low, with the daily average number who have booked a library or study space around 100, less than 1% of City's student population.
- EB was considering how communications to all students with regard to accessing campus might be strengthened to make it clearer to students that they were entitled to book space.

- City had ordered FFP2 face masks for close contact work of 1m or less (for use in practical labs and our practical areas across SMSCE/SASS) and for distribution to student ambassadors, security staff and other essential staff members on site. These would arrive on Monday 15th February.
- Students and staff attending campus were being asked to take a test twice a week. The University of London (UoL) testing site would remain open until at least the end of March and asymptomatic testing was also available at Islington Town Hall for anyone who lives or works in Islington. As of the previous day, a total of 26% of bookings at the UoL testing site had been made by City staff and students.
- EB had approved the reopening of the prayer rooms on campus. Department of Education guidance allows prayer rooms to be open for individual prayer and the rooms would be monitored discreetly by “Keep City Safe” Ambassadors.
- Staff on campus were those for whom working from home was not possible (in line with government guidance) – this meant staff required to conduct face-to-face teaching in SHS, staff who required to use laboratories to conduct research, staff in the library (which was being kept open, in line with government guidance) and security staff (required to keep the campus open, in line with government guidance).
- A small number of staff had expressed a very strong preference to return to campus for reasons of mental health and had also been permitted to work on campus in recent weeks (after submitting requests through their line managers and completing health and safety assessments).
- The Director of HR noted that City was trying to balance the support it provided to students with the need to follow government guidelines, whilst addressing concerns raised by the Trade Unions.
- All universities were following government guidance and providing face to face teaching and services on campus for students only for those courses set out in government sectoral guidance and for support services to students as detailed in government guidance (notably students in digital poverty).
- Senior staff present on campus were those senior staff in PAF, SHS and the Library for whom it was not possible to work from home under the provisions of the lockdown and sectoral guidance. Other senior leaders were complying with government guidance that employees should work from home whenever possible.
- Further government guidance on the easing of lockdown, including sectoral guidance, was expected on 22nd February.
- The Chair asked that a protocol be developed to ensure that a member of the Senior Team was present on campus during the week. **[Action]**

Professor Anthony Finkelstein joined the meeting.

10. Student Experience – Teaching and Learning

Council noted papers setting out reflections on Term One student experience, teaching and learning and in discussion the following points were noted:

- Throughout Term 1, online teaching and learning had been the sole mode for many City students, and the dominant mode for the rest. Nearly all assessment had been online. Most student support services had been delivered solely online. SHS was the exception to this in maintaining in-person teaching, assessment and support as the dominant mode. SHS had retained this approach during the current lockdown in line with Government guidance.
- Students had reported particular challenges in gaining individual and group support, and for some the quality of the online learning experience had not matched expectations. For Term 2, programmes sought to increase the number of ‘live’ (rather than recorded) teaching sessions to respond to

student feedback. City also boosted resources for student support, particularly within Schools, in response to student feedback.

- The broader on-campus student experience (social, cultural, activities offered by City or the Students' Union) had been almost non-existent. Exceptions had been CitySport and Prayer, but these were suspended due to the latest lockdown but the Prayer rooms would be reopening in due course. Access to study, IT and library space was still available in accordance with Government guidance.
 - The Student Attainment and Assessment Working Group had begun work to ensure students were not disadvantaged by weak performance on assessments when their performance has been impacted by circumstances relating to the pandemic. Key mitigations considered by the group thus far included: the automatic consideration of Extenuating Circumstances (EC) requests and the extension of the EC submission deadline, the holding of Interim Assessment Panels for term 1 assessments, reviewing students marks and provisional scaling recommendations, support and access to resources and materials for students who fail/are underperforming.
 - The DP&P together with the Director of Educational Development and the Director of Student & Academic Services, had shared with EB draft scenarios and design principles for City's educational offer, student support and student experience in 2021/22. EB acknowledged the difficulties in planning for next year given the obvious pandemic uncertainties but felt that forward planning for each scenario would put City in the best possible position to meet the needs of its students. Further planning work with Schools, Students Union and Professional Services would be ongoing in the coming weeks.
 - Online interaction including one to one interactions between staff and students meant that City had been more responsive (in a timely manner) to students than ever before.
 - Planning and scoping for the future would reflect what had been learned during the pandemic. In particular, it was likely that the approach assessments would be changed for the future by the pandemic.
 - The papers presented to Council had contained very little data or analysis of data. Once appropriate data had been aggregated, the DP&P would provide Council with an analytics paper, to provide more detailed information, e.g. the percentage of students who had been identified as requiring targeted support.
- [Action]**
- The Chair welcomed the collaborative approach adopted by City on these issues and noted the continued importance for consistent, early and clear communications to students.

11. Academic Quality and Standards Assurance Report

Council noted the Academic Quality and Standards Assurance Report. Even though there was no longer a requirement to submit this report to the OfS, Council welcomed the assurance it provided and wished to continue to receive it annually. **[Action]**

12. Finance

12.1 2020 Financial Plan and OfS AFR

Council considered the 2020 Financial Plan and OfS AFR and in discussion the following points were noted:

- The 2020 Five-Year Financial Plan had been finalised and formed the first part of the report. This report was presented to SIPCo on 21 January 2021 and was reproduced with only one amendment to the risks in section 8. This was to reflect possible changes to government funding from 2021/22. There was a definite risk to City due to the proposed withdrawal of London Weighting, but there were other changes that could offset this – so no changes to the numbers in the plan had made in the plan at this stage.

- The key changes since October arose from the 2020/21 Budget being updated with the Mid-Year Forecast, and from a refresh of student number assumptions and income forecasts from 2021/22 onwards. A new MetLife Liquidity covenant had also now been agreed for 2020/21 and this was explained in the report.
- Allowance had not been made in the plan for any future rise in USS contributions but this would be kept under review.
- The figures the Financial Plan had been used to populate the OfS Annual Financial Return (AFR). The draft template had been submitted to meet the February 1st deadline and was undergoing validation checks.

Decision

Council **approved** the final version of the 2020 Financial Plan and the OfS Annual Financial Return.

12.2 Annual UBS Investments Report

Council noted the report which had been considered by SIPCo in January.

Professor Juliet John, Professor Raj Roy and Professor Andrew Stockley joined the meeting.

13. Executive Board Report – Verbal Update

The Interim DP gave a verbal update on the work of the Executive Board noting that EB had focussed on Covid campus management (meeting every day in the first week of this term) and that financial sustainability remained very much at the centre of discussions.

The Chair invited each Dean to provide a brief update and the following points were noted:

Dean of the School of Health Sciences

The Dean shared a short video showing the experience of SHS students on the frontline during the pandemic; and the following points were noted in discussion:

- Staff continued to work to develop and deliver high quality skills-based online teaching where possible – to enable students to work and study safely.
- The Dean and staff were in regular liaison with Health Education England and the individual trusts – and staff had gone well beyond the call of duty.
- The School also distributed its own PPE equipment to its care home partners and colleagues when they were experiencing shortages.
- Staff continually developed processes and mechanisms for managing staff and student safety when in attendance on campus. It was a credit to the School that no SHS students had thus far reported contracting Covid and the School had worked closely with the Unions and SU to manage staff and student concerns and anxieties.
- Last month, the Mayor of London had declared a major incident in London hospitals and the reintroduction of emergency standards – resulting in both SHS staff and students being called back to the frontline. With short notice conversion of regular wards to “Covid-19 wards”.
- The School had sadly lost a number of colleagues and alumni to Covid which was particularly difficult for staff and students.
- The effort, care and commitment shown by SHS staff to enable the School to continue to operate and provide the fullest service and support to its students should be applauded.
- Academic staff in the School continued to play a key role in Covid-related research over the last 12 months.
- The disruption caused had been very unsettling for students. The move from bursaries to loans for students on healthcare programmes has seen many students paying their tuition fees whilst having to join the workforce to help deal with the pandemic.

- Students working on the frontline had to deal with the anxiety that they might contract Covid and in turn, pass it on to family members.
- There had been a lack of placements (for obvious reasons) during the lockdown and this would have had an impact on student studies.
- The Dean was proud of the professionalism her students had shown in the pandemic – many were from disadvantaged backgrounds, and all had faced immense challenges.
- The Chair thanked the Dean for this inspirational update and thanked staff and students in SHS for their continued commitment.

Dean of the City Law School

- The School had overrecruited to the LLB course; and had successfully launched the Bar Vocational Programme in the middle of the pandemic.
- The School had performed well financially, as its income was up and overall it had improved by £4M on this year's original budget. The level of School contribution would decrease in the future but the School recognised the current importance of its contribution to City as a whole.
- Too many modules had been running which were not financially viable, and for the 2020/21 Academic Programmes, 49 modules had been suspended, equating to a 27.6% reduction overall.
- Law School staff had delivered in-person tutorials for up to 950 undergraduate students through the first half of the previous term, prior to the second government lockdown.
- Work had been undertaken to ensure more consistent and more appropriate grading for students taking the LLB course. This too should eventually impact positively on the student experience.
- The student-staff ratios in the School, at 40/1, were out of line with other Law Schools (where the norm was 20-30/1) - with an increased intake of students and many staff vacancies meaning that the School was currently under-resourced. This would inevitably impact negatively on the student experience but was now being successfully addressed through recruiting additional academic staff in key areas.
- The Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE) would be the new centralised way to qualify as a solicitor in England and Wales and preparatory work was underway in the School for the substantial changes which will be required.
- A further challenge facing the School was to improve student participation on academic programmes – many students don't take up the support offered.
- The Chair thanked the Dean and noted how much had been achieved since his arrival.

Dean of the School of Arts and Social Sciences

- The School's main focus was education and the student experience and the Dean had been encouraged by how many of her staff had gone "the extra mile" over the course of the year.
- To ensure that all staff were on board with that overall focus and to ensure consistency across the School each department had been asked to appoint an Education Lead. The goal was to create a much more joined-up approach to education in the School and to review any emerging issues on a regular basis.
- In November, the School had held an NSS-focussed Away Day attended by colleagues from the School and across City. The aim was to share good practice and strategies and to begin to set down an "across the board" approach to education.
- It was the role of Senior Tutors to ensure that personal tutoring was working effectively and senior staff had access to Moodle for auditing purposes. The process for gathering student feedback had improved and thus far there had

been a lot of positive feedback since the beginning of term and there had been a far lower drop-out rate compared to previous years.

- Despite the disappointing USS scores recruitment numbers were up.
- The Economics Department had been persuaded to slightly lower their entry requirements and had experienced a huge rise in applications – so the Dean would look to introduce this approach with other departments.
- A new leadership group had been established and the Heads of Department were full of energy with a collective goal to move up the rankings. Professor Mera who had undertaken the role of Interim Dean prior to Juliet's arrival had worked hard to change the culture from an oppositional relationship between the Dean and the rest of the School to a more collaborative/united one.
- The Dean would like to see the introduction of more joint and interdisciplinary degrees, e.g., English with Computer Science. This would meet the demand from employers for more flexible "rounded" graduate employees. This would take some work as the current administration systems were more suited to single rather than joint honours degrees.
- A big driver in relation to student satisfaction was perceived unfairness and the other related to organisational set up. Currently the 7 areas within the School had different administrative approaches/systems. A review would be undertaken to simplify the overall system and to ensure that academic departments moved towards greater parity in terms of operational activity.
- Another challenge would be to address the drop in research output across the School (could be linked to issues around gender) and planning for the next REF needed to begin. Colleagues were, however, hopeful for a good outcome from the current REF.
- The Chair thanked the Dean for her update and noted that the parity of the student experience should be a priority for both City and Council.

Dean of the School of Mathematics, Economics and Computer Sciences

- The School's ambition and commitment to improving the experience of its students was at the heart of everything it did.
- The School was adopting a systematic approach to improve learning through assessment and through benchmarking.
- Blended learning was the future for the School and this approach would go a long way to supporting its commuter students. Before Covid, student feedback consistently demonstrated that more blended learning was being requested.
- The introduction of Senior Fellows to promote educational excellence had created a positive shift in the School and this needed to continue.
- Research was extremely important for STEM subjects and there was a need to identify new areas for growth. The School had increased its number of £100k plus research grant application submissions and there were significant opportunities in research for STEM subjects.
- The Space Institute would be launched on 3rd March and would enable City to make an impression with regard to space analytics and space governance etc., This was all necessary to align with national objectives.
- Two members of the Schools academic staff had been accepted to join the Royal Academy.
- The School was focussing on forging industrial partnerships, e.g., with Tesco, in order to develop a deeper knowledge in different sectors.
- One challenge for the School was the lack of integrated systems and services across City in relation to the student experience and operational activity. There also needed to be more ownership of common tasks, e.g., of work to improve City's ranking position.
- The Chair thanked the Dean for his update noting the commitment to blended learning into the future and for the need of improved integration of services

and new disciplines. These points should be borne in mind during the strategy refresh discussions.

Dean of the Business School

- The Dean was proud of staff in the School who had developed a detailed plan for blended learning delivery before the summer. The feedback from students demonstrated that they had been pleased with the delivery of teaching in the first term.
- The School continued to work extremely hard on “changing more than a name”. The first challenge was to embed diversity, equality and inclusion and BAME activities were under review, and included the provision of scholarships for BAME students. A review of the curriculum was also underway.
- The School had made good progress on its brand and in building a consensus – when this becomes clearer it will also inform the School’s vision refresh. When the marketing campaign for the new name begins, it will be used as an opportunity to help the School grow and it was hoped it would improve applications as a result of the publicity generated.
- The Dean’s biggest concern currently was the huge uncertainty associated with postgraduate recruitment. The uncertainty was due to the School’s heavy reliance on international students balanced with the travel restrictions which it was likely would impact for some time. A clearer picture would not emerge until late August.
- The Chair thanked the Dean and noted that the Postgraduate numbers were a big concern for Council and City.

The Chair noted that there was still a huge amount to be done across all of the Schools and both Council and City needed to be clear when looking towards the Strategy refresh that City was focussed as an organisation.

14. REF 2021 Status Report

Council noted the report and that the significance for City of a good result for staff and, in turn, for student recruitment, could not be underestimated.

15. Council Away Day: The Strategy Development Process

As time did not allow for Council to discuss this item, members were asked to send any further questions or comments to the Chair, President-elect, College Secretary and VP (S&P). **[Action]**

Part Three – Items for Information

16. Minutes for Note

- 16.1** Senate, Wednesday 9th December 2020
- 16.2** SIPCo, Thursday 21st January 2021

17. Student Experience Task and Finish Group - Closing the Feedback Loop

Council noted the report.

18. Global Goals Report

Council noted the report

19. FOI Review

Council **agreed** that no changes were required.

20. Date of Next Meeting

Council, 26th March 2021, 9am, via Microsoft Teams.

Part Four – Meeting of Independent Members

There was a brief informal discussion among the independent members which was not minuted.

Julia Palca, Chair of Council, February 2021.