
College Council Minutes - Approved

Date	20 January 2022, 17.00
Location	Microsoft Teams
Present	Nhuoc Lan Tu (Vice-Chair); Vivek Ahuja; Dr Hillary Briffa; Paul Cartwright; Donna Catley; Sir Jon Coles; Michael D'Souza; Paul Goswell; Sir Ron Kerr; Steve Large; The Rt Revd and Rt Hon Dame Sarah Mullally; Kat Thorne; Clare Sumner; Zahra Syed; Professor Richard Trembath, Professor Guy Tear; and Professor Evelyn Welch.
Apologies	Lord Geidt
In attendance	Rebecca Seling, KCLSU Vice-President Education (Postgraduate) (<i>standing attendee</i>) Annie Kent, CFO/Vice President (Finance) (<i>for Item 4.1 – Five-Year Plan Update</i>) Adam Fagan, Interim VP Education (<i>for Item 8 – Equalising Opportunities</i>) 'Funmi Olonisakin, VP Global Engagement (<i>for Item 8 – Equalising Opportunities</i>) Deborah Bull, VP Communities and National Engagement (<i>for Item 8 – Equalising Opportunities</i>)
	Secretariat: Irene Birrell, College Secretary Joanna Brown, Governance Manager Xan Kite, Director of Governance Paul Mould, Deputy College Secretary & Chief Compliance Officer

1 Welcome, apologies and notices

Apologies had been received from Lord Geidt. Lan Tu, Vice-Chair, took the Chair.

No notice of conflicts of interest had been received. Members were asked to confirm that the currently published register of interests was accurate. No conflicts of interests in relation to any of the agenda items was declared.

Council agreed that this standing item be retitled to "Declaration of Interests". It was noted that the list of interests provided was very lengthy and that many of the items would have no bearing on the work of Council. It was suggested that this be further reviewed by GNC.

2 Approval of agenda

The report of the KCLSU President was moved forward in the agenda to follow the report of the President & Principal. The agenda was approved.

3 Unanimous Consent Agenda (including Minutes of the Previous Meeting) [KCC-22-10-20-03]

The President & Principal proposed an amendment to the final item in the minutes, and that the minutes be approved excepting that item, with a revised paragraph to be circulated to members by email for formal approval.

The President of the KCLSU asked for clarification with respect to the reference in the five-year plan to increased teaching resource. The Senior Vice President (Service, People & Planning) noted that an increased number of GTAs and contract staff had been hired to address the unanticipated increase in enrolment this year. However, it was not planned to retain this high level of enrolment going forward.

Members raised several queries on the Actions Log:

[REDACTED]

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Fundraising report to address issues related to NSS: It was clarified that this action had resulted from a specific conversation at the July 2020 Council meeting with the Fundraising team. Notwithstanding that discussion, the Principal assured Council that addressing student experience concerns raised by NSS was 'core business' and would be properly funded through operating funding. These were not matters that could rely on optional fundraising.

A member noted an ongoing tension between Council discussions about managing increasing costs and the concerns of staff around precarity, fixed term contracts and resulting industrial action and reflected on how these might be aligned. The Vice-Chair suggested that these were not matters in opposition but rather reflective of difficult choices with which the College and Council had to contend. The Principal noted that the strategic paper on people and culture to be discussed later in the meeting set out clearly that people are the College's biggest expense but are at the heart of what we do.

The reports on the Unanimous Consent Agenda were otherwise taken as read and noted or approved as set out in the papers.

4 Matters Arising from the Minutes

Five-Year Plan Update

The Vice President (Finance) provided an update on the five-year planning reported at the November meeting when the externally-facing baseline plan had been presented for submission to the Office for Students (OfS), noting that work was also underway to develop a stretching internal five-year plan in line with outline strategy refresh, investment needs and a target margin 6%.

The Vice-President (Finance) noted that additional unplanned growth had occurred this year bringing further pressure on the academic and professional service staff. Financially King's would close with a 5% margin or better which was above the budget of 2.7%. However, operations were not sustainable at this level of resourcing. The OfS baseline five-year plan required efficiency savings of £10m per year which covered the loss of inflation on home student fees year on year and gave a total of £42m efficiency. Since reporting in November, it was noted that growing inflation beyond forecasts would have significant impact on staffing and pay. This meant that the forecasts carried increased prudence in margin potential of up to 1%.

2022/23 would be a challenging year because the good financial returns in 2021 were due to unplanned growth and increased staffing and support costs would balance this out. The sector would be faced with increased inflation, higher pay increase expectations, risks associated with pension, National Insurance increases, and rising utilities costs. The OfS return would be completed and submitted with the agreement of the Chair of the Finance Committee, and the internal five-year planning assumptions and plans would be tested by the Finance Committee at its February away day.

5 Report of the Chair

Nothing to report.

6 Report of the President & Principal

6.1 Summary Report on Key Issues [KCC-22-10-20-06.1]

The President & Principal presented his report to Council. Updates not included within the report included:

Coronavirus: Post Christmas assessments had been carried out in very constrained circumstances, and relatively flawlessly, with 20,000 examination scripts being turned in every day over the last week.

Industrial action: the report provided some sense of the numbers and impact. Staff who were on strike would not be paid for those days and the salary savings would be ring fenced in a compensation pot to be used to in response to student complaints once their extent was known.

Death of Archbishop Desmond Tutu: The Principal noted the sad loss of Archbishop Tutu. King's had been represented at the funeral by Dean Ellen Clark King and Professor Simon Tanner. A fitting memorial service would be held at the College in the near future.

Relationship with the Defence Academy: King's had recently signed a contract to renew its relationship with the Defence Academy, the collection of all of the education arms of the military, of which the largest entity was the Joint Services Staff College in Shrivenham. This was an important relationship to have maintained given that some 60 or so King's staff were involved in the programmes offered.

6.2 Update on Strategy Refresh [KCC-22-10-20-06.2]

The President & Principal presented the Update on Strategy Refresh report, which provided a sense of the current thinking though without financial detail. The five-year plan being developed under the auspices of the Vice-President (Finance) would dovetail with the strategy development and the two would come to Council together later in the year.

Members found the report helpful and clearly laid out. Some suggestions included:

- Ensuring that digital elements (including AI) were captured in a cohesive way across the organisation and linked to staff and student experience. It was important that digital issues not be seen as stand alone. There was a lot going on in this area outside higher education and the university should take advantage of expertise that could be available to it.
- Not losing the sense that getting the basics right was a first principle and acknowledging this clearly in the wording.
- There should be some focus on the ability to execute on capital projects systematically with respect to budget and time.
- King's already carries out significant research on environment and sustainability but we need to define collectively where our ambitions lie – where can we be exceptional and provide the most societal value.
- The ability to recruit and retain the right people to develop and implement the strategy will be critical.

The following report had been approved on the Unanimous Consent Agenda

6.3 Modern Slavery Act 2020-2021 [KCC-22-01-20-06.3]

Decision:

That the Modern Slavery Act Transparency Statement 2020-2021 for the financial year ended 31 July 2021, be approved.

7 Report of the KCLSU President [KCC-22-01-20-10]

The KCLSU President presented her report to Council, highlighting in particular the challenges presented by Omicron, including the impact on graduation dates; and the potential impact of the UCU strike and related activity on NSS scores.

In answer to comments and questions she noted that:

- KCLSU was working to tackle harassment, an issue impacting student wellbeing, through strategic conversations with the Students and Education Directorate, including ways of keeping conversations going as student leadership changed. This might include, for example improved induction around key values. The Community Charter was a good first step, but its tenets needed to be embedded. There was also ongoing discussion about improving the processes for dealing with these issues. KCLSU was proactively advocating King's as an inclusive space and was working to target and involve those harder to engage students.
- The KCLSU had long been involved in discussions with the Office for Students about the structure of NSS and the current officer team had been discussing the strategic importance of NSS to students; at the same time, it was trying to raise student awareness of the survey.

8 People & Culture – Current and Emerging Issues [KCC-22-01-20-07]

The Senior Vice President (Services, People & Planning) presented the report to Council, which provided further information on what had been done at King's on emerging issues related to people and culture, further to the discussion arising at the November meeting of Council on the UCU strike action.

The SVP noted that, while King's met most of the Union's demands as demonstrated by the data, this was not reflected in the sense among staff and there was a need to look more holistically at people and culture. A gap in our governance structures had been identified and proposals would be coming forward to address that at both the Council and Executive levels. It was noted that investing in the people who made up King's would cost more money at a time of inflationary pressures and no increase in income.

The Senior Vice President (Operations) pointed out that the university had grown significantly since 2012 when caps on student numbers had been lifted, and the pay bill had risen and mirrored the growth in the university. However, in terms of the broad metrics of the university the student/staff ratio had remained largely the same. The charts in the paper reflected some recent productivity benefits but this was in part due to responses to Covid and was expected to be short-term. The make-up of academic and professional staff had changed somewhat over time so that there was a higher proportion of FTE professional staff than 20 years ago, but this was partly attributable to the insourcing of cleaning and security staff. The proportion of pay between faculty and central professional services staff remained largely unchanged. Trend data would see an increase in the use of GTAs and staff on fixed term contracts, including PhD researchers/Early Career Researchers as King's research profile grew but the make-up of King's full staff cohort included many contracted staff not reflected in the published data. It was noted that King's was now a bit different from its peers having brought its Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) and hourly lecturers directly on to its books.

The Senior Vice-President (Services, People & Planning) noted that an underlying issue for the university, and in higher education generally, was the lack of a sense of stability of career for entry-level academics. Also, the President and Principal's listening exercise analysis had suggested it was not just the number of hours people were working but the composition of workload that was causing challenges.

Points raised in discussion included:

BAME issues

- Students want to see themselves reflected in the leadership. While there had been a rise in BAME staff this had not been in senior professional service roles. Occupational segregation

was one of the biggest issues faced with respect to progression and it was important to try to understand where the barriers are. With only an eight-percentage point improvement, it would take a long time to get to 50/50 representation.

- The Athena Swan Charter process had helped King's with its increase in senior women in academic roles. The Race Equality Charter Mark was the new focus. It was noted that it was important to focus on the right behaviour rather than goal numbers: for example, the in-sourcing of King's cleaning and service staff had negatively impacted ethnicity pay gap figures but it was the right thing to do. King's recruitment agencies had remits to produce diverse fields of excellent candidates but there was also a need to help develop the staff already at King's.
- It was noted that the issues King's faced were not unique to King's nor to education: they were challenges that all organisations face and would get tougher in an inflationary environment.
- King's last Athena Swan application involved a survey on trust and belonging: 80 percent of staff felt they belonged at King's but only 40 percent trusted the leadership, indicating a need to build trust and focus on King's leadership being seen to really listen and respond genuinely to concerns.

Early Career Researchers (ECRs) and Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs):

- A member noted that issues of precarity amongst ECRs and GTAs had a direct impact on workload stress. Individuals working contract to contract did not feel that they could say 'no' to requests for fear that could be the difference between being re-signed or not.
- There was a need to think about succession and progression points: if someone is on contract for six years then clearly that role is needed. The SVP (SPP) stated King's did have a policy that after four years a contract should be converted to an open continuing contract. However, research funders presented a challenge as some did not allow research staff on permanent contracts to be paid from their project funds. A national strategy to support these researchers would be helpful, but in its absence, King's was resolved to tackle the system and processes.
- There was need to consider the impact of ECR/GTA statistics on the student experience: both that of doctoral students who filled the largest proportion of GTA posts and undergraduate students who might feel disappointment at being taught by graduate students rather than leaders in their academic fields.
- A member challenged the historic distribution of power and authority and the structures universities used to deploy their workforces and proposed that King's aspire to being a leading institution in the country prioritising the creation of a different structure of organisation.

9 Equalising Opportunities – local, national & global [KCC-22-01-20-08]

The Interim Vice President (Education) presented the report to Council, which summarised developments in widening participation (WP) at King's, including areas in which there had been considerable success and areas where progress had been more limited. The paper outlined strategic priorities for the next three-year period, King's response to predicted changes in Government policy and its ongoing commitment to social mobility within the local, national and global contexts.

During discussion points raised included:

- It would be helpful to understand the budget that needs to be put against this given other priorities. What are the trade-offs? It was important to be focused and not scattershot.
- We need to think about issues of affordability and the barriers to access to education. London is one of the most expensive places to take a degree and that in itself would be a significant barrier to someone from a lower socio-economic background.
- King's own WP priorities (as opposed to the government's levelling up agenda): Does King's want to focus on being the best in London and the southeast? Has King's been radical enough about course offers, e.g., shorter courses, in terms of tackling affordability and accessibility?

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- More WP programmes in and with schools would be welcomed provided that they were well thought through and designed. It was noted that some of the schools in the most disadvantaged areas had adopted very strict and formal regimes alongside a knowledge-rich curriculum that was favoured by Government. However, these did not recognise the project-based pedagogies supported by most universities and there was a risk of this being poor preparation for more open, self-directed university life. Helping WP students succeed at university once they arrived was critical. It was noted that King's First Year focus was on setting expectations and understanding the diversity of experience that students bring to university.
 - There was need for caution and careful thought about where to create partnerships. That should be done in consultation with communities. King's aimed to address levelling up opportunities for young people from all backgrounds.
 - King's is a leading Russell Group university in terms of social mobility, but this is tied to having a higher BAME cohort and a higher focus on professional programmes. There is a need to personalise education and develop more granular data to understand and address social mobility issues and the attainment gap.
 - Consideration needs to be given to the unintended impact on communities in the global south of internationalisation and the recruitment of the best and brightest to UK universities; further, how do we integrate and extend WP to the best and brightest of international students who are less privileged and cannot afford to pursue university education?

10 Reports of Committees

10.1 Report of the Academic Board [KCC-22-01-20-09.1]

All items were noted on the Consent Agenda:

- (i) World-Class Education Strategy Refresh
- (ii) Review of King's policy and procedures for approval of international partnerships
- (iii) Academic Board Annual Business Plan
- (iv) Regular items

11 Any Other Business

None

Nhuoc Lan Tu
January 2022