

MINUTES

STRATEGY AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE, SP-13

Date: Tuesday 12 October 2021

Time: 1500

Location: Boardroom, University House

Notes:

1. *Items marked with an asterisk (starred items) were for information only or regarded as noncontentious. Starred items will not be discussed and will be assumed to have been noted or approved unless a request to unstar a named item is received from a Board member in advance, or at the commencement, of the meeting.*
2. *Items classified as Confidential, and their subsequent minutes (highlighted here in blue), will be redacted before publication of the agenda and minutes on the University's public website.*

Members		
Professor Liz Barnes	Vice Chancellor	P
Hannah Blackburn	Student Governor (President, Students' Union)	P
Glenn Earlam (Deputy Chair)	External Member	P (T)
Colin Hughes	External Member	P
Baljinder Kuller	External Member	P
Simon Smith	Staff Governor (academic staff)	P
Sara Williams (Chair)	External Member	P
In attendance		
Ian Blachford	Chief Operating Officer and Clerk to the Board of Governors	IA
Professor Martin Jones	Deputy Vice Chancellor	IA
Annabel Kiernan	Pro Vice Chancellor – Education	IA
Paul Marshall	Executive Director of Strategic & Academic Planning	IA
Sally McGill	Chief Financial Officer	IA (T)
Andrew Proctor	Pro Vice Chancellor - Digital	IA
Lauren Rooke	Assistant Clerk to the Board of Governors (minutes)	IA

P = Present; A = Apologies; Ab = Absent; L = Late; IA = In Attendance

232	There were no apologies for absence .						
233	There were no new Declarations of interest .						
234	<p>The following Membership of the Committee for 2021/22 was noted:</p> <table> <thead> <tr> <th>Constitution</th> <th>MEMBERSHIP</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>External Members</td> <td>Jonathan Chapman Glenn Earlam (Deputy Chair) Sara Williams (Chair) Baljinder Kuller Colin Hughes</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Student Governor</td> <td>Hannah Blackburn (President, Students' Union)</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Constitution	MEMBERSHIP	External Members	Jonathan Chapman Glenn Earlam (Deputy Chair) Sara Williams (Chair) Baljinder Kuller Colin Hughes	Student Governor	Hannah Blackburn (President, Students' Union)
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Student Governor	Hannah Blackburn (President, Students' Union)						

	<p>Staff Governor Simon Smith (Academic Staff Governor)</p> <p>Vice Chancellor Professor Liz Barnes</p> <p>In attendance Ian Blachford, Chief Operating Officer & Clerk to the Board Sally McGill, Chief Financial Officer Professor Martin Jones, Deputy Vice Chancellor Dr Annabel Kiernan, Pro Vice Chancellor – Education Andrew Proctor, Pro Vice Chancellor – Digital Paul Marshall, Executive Director of Academic & Strategic Planning</p>
235	The Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee , 15 June 2021 SP/13/01, were signed as a true and accurate record.
236	<p>Matters arising:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minute 191 (Matters Arising) IoT Wave Two – a verbal update from the Deputy Vice Chancellor was noted. • Minute 169 (Matters arising) - Academic Quality and Standards Assurance Eco-System – it was noted this had been considered at Academic Board on 16 June 2021 and then approved by Board of Governors on 30 June 2021. • Minute 215 – Cybersecurity – it was noted that this had been added to the Committee’s regular annual business cycle overview (June meeting), as per discussions at the last meeting. • Minute 218 – Towards 2030 Strategy and KPIs – it was noted that the Strategic Event had been held on 24 August 2021, where the development of the new strategic plan and the supporting KPIs had been discussed in detail. A further update on this would be provided in due course, responding to Governor feedback. • Minute 223 – Enterprise Strategy – it was noted that an update report would be provided at the next meeting of the Committee.
237	The Committee noted the *Overview of annual business 2021-22* SP/13/02.
2 FOR DISCUSSION AND/OR APPROVAL (marked below accordingly)	
238	The Committee received and approved the Terms of Reference for the Strategy & Performance Committee 2021-22 SP/13/03, agreeing to refer these to the Board of Governors for formal approval.
239	<p>The committee considered a paper on the Strategic Context for Higher Education (direction of travel) SP/13/04, presented by the Vice Chancellor, who noted the following main points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The external environment for the higher education sector continued to develop swiftly and much uncertainty remained. The paper updated the Committee on recent changes within the sector (including ministerial changes within government, the Comprehensive spending Review (CRS) and the response to the Augar Review, the implementation of the Skills Bill and OfS Q&S reform) and clarified how this external context was shaping the University’s strategic priorities and future direction. <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liz Barnes highlighted the publication of the recent Education Bill, noting that she had been on a DofE call that morning. • Colin Hughes noted that it was clear from conversations at the recent Conservative Party Conference a perceived over-subscribing of university places was a significant theme for many attendees. • Sara Williams asked about potential allies and areas of focus for the University within the current landscape and Martin Jones highlighted the Made in Stoke initiative (coordinated by the University’s Jenny Amphlett). Martin further noted that the Labour party was now starting to reference Stoke-on-Trent within its discourse, as an illustrative example. • Colin Hughes noted the importance of highlighting the real-world impact of decreases to funding for key workers such as paramedics and teachers, with Liz Barnes noting that it seemed that anecdotally, there was likely to be a serious shortage of teachers within the UK within the next three years.
240	<p>The Committee received, as a precursor to a strategic discussion, a paper on Collaborative Academic Partnerships – Current Position and Future Developments SP/13/05. The Pro Vice Chancellor – Education noted the following main points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This paper outlined the University’s response to the changing external environment as well as its approach to partnerships moving forward. The focus was on partnerships with educational providers who delivered Staffordshire University (SU) courses, and the paper outlined the key priorities for the University in relation to activity with collaborative academic partnerships. • The Government’s UK and international education agendas meant that Collaborative Academic Partnerships were of increasing significance in supporting the University in its key mission of transforming lives, economies and places and to enabling the University to maintain a high profile both nationally and internationally.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The external environment provided a new range of challenges and opportunities. In addition to offering franchise and validation services (and income generation), these partnerships needed to afford us additional benefits such as increased recruitment to on-campus courses, increased visibility in specific geographical areas and to support FE/HE bids and Government priorities, for example T-levels. CAPs supported the University's commitments in its Access and Participation Plan and other data reporting. CAPs had a higher performance and more agile delivery to respond to external changes as outlined in the report and was working to move from a focusing on reviewing, monitoring and compliance at partners to a more strategic direction. <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Glenn Earlam underlined the complexity of the area and noted that the paper did not wholly make clear the main motivations around the creating of partnerships. Sara Williams agreed that it would be helpful to see further information around determining factors for partnerships. Annabel Kiernan highlighted that the rationale behind a particular collaboration was often multi-faceted and could include varied factors such as assisting recruitment/progression, widening participation, or income. Decisions on partnerships were therefore multifaceted. Jonathan Chapman raised the issue of agility in terms of student volume. Liz Barnes clarified that in 2016, the University had had ca. 19,000 students with partners overseas. The risk around quality at such a large partnership provision was significant, and we now had ca. 8,000 (and were still in teach-out with some providers), in order to deliberately mitigate this risk.
241	<p>The Committee received for discussion a paper on Evaluating delivery of the University's Strategic Plan – Innovative and Applied Learning SP/13/06, introduced by the Pro Vice Chancellor – Education.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This paper outlined the University's current performance against the KPIs for the Innovative and Applied Learning strategic theme and demonstrated how the 2030 academic strategy was being implemented. The implementation programme would help to drive performance in the relevant theme metrics and the University had headline workstreams which, taken together, gave shape and tangible milestones for the delivery of this strategic imperative: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Estate as place-making Lifelong and life-wide learning: Institute of Education (IoE) Curriculum agility Academic Professional Development To support the continuing learning and learning environment transformation and to shape sector thinking in new research pedagogies, the Academic Career Pathway was being developed in order to convert practice into REF and KEF capability. A focus was also being renewed on the HEA Fellowship, supporting colleagues to attain HEA status and to increase the numbers of Principal Fellows as part of the University's pedagogic leadership in the sector. <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jonathan Chapman highlighted the staff challenge within this key KPI theme. Martin Jones reminded the Committee that Staffordshire Centre of Learning and Pedagogic Practice (SCoLPP)'s work was accelerating progress in this area. Simon Smith noted his experience of the move to online learning and Annabel Kiernan clarified that sequential block mode was currently being evaluated. Anecdotally, it seemed to be working well within some areas but it was acknowledged that it would not be appropriate for all disciplines. Members discussed the likely impact on the KPIs, with it being noted that the student evaluation system (EvaSys) was currently being refreshed. A further update would be available at the February 2022 Committee meeting.
242	<p>The Committee received for discussion a paper on the Student Recruitment and Enrolment Position 2021-22 SP/13/07, Pro Vice Chancellor – Education.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The paper's projected positions had been calculated from the recruitment position as at the 22 September, applying previous conversion performance to arrive at a final position. The enrolment phase was now well underway, when students completed their contract with the University and fees were charged. As of the 22 September 2216 New UG FT Home/EU students had completed the enrolment process, with 334 now awaiting final confirmation (F2F) and 249 in the process of enrolment. All Undergraduate Full Time (UG FT) students were due to be enrolled by 15 October and remaining Part time (PT) and Postgraduate taught (PGT) students by the 22 October. Due to the pandemic, international students had until 15 November to enrol. This year, students had entered the application process later than in previous years which would have an impact on how far they were through the process. However, due to a slightly later start date for the academic year we had an extra week prior to Welcome Week that helped our final conversion position. The report described the enrolment position to date, with further detail on application performance included in the appendices.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Although we had already taken steps to improve our recruitment performance for the 2022-23 cycle, there were further strategic implications signposted within the report. A full and comprehensive analysis was scheduled for October, and again with the end-of-cycle report in January. <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sara Williams asked about financial implications around the student recruitment and enrolment position. Sally McGill noted that financial impact was predicted as a £1.9m reduction in UG income and £0.6m in PGT, totalling £2.5m, but that we had a provision of £3.9m against this. We would, however, have to look at resources against each department to reflect changes in student numbers (up and down) against budget. Glenn Earlam asked about the position with student numbers amongst our comparators/peers. Liz Barnes noted that this was variable across the sector with many post-92s enveloped by the turbulence of the last 18 months and the grading changes - many students had essentially “traded up” in terms of their firm offers. Keele, for example, was seen as more selective than Staffordshire, and had therefore gained some of our numbers. It was noted that Keele had however seen a drop in some areas, e.g. for Law, where students had been lost to Birmingham. Staffordshire’s significant mature learner demographic had meant that a decline within that group was more noticeable than within our 18-25-yr old intake and had also impacted upon recruitment for September 2021 entry. Baljinder Kuller asked about a potential knock-on effect from the “trading up” that some cohorts had experienced elsewhere and Liz Barnes confirmed that some HEIs were already marketing themselves to appeal to those who had accepted at higher tariff universities, where they may not flourish. It was hoped that a certain rebalance would take place within next year’s recruitment round. Hannah Blackburn asked about the likely prognosis, especially given that many Russell Group HEIs were oversubscribed this year and had been obliged to defer students. It was noted that UCAS were already tightening up gaps in order to rebalance and many Russell Group institutions were already looking to increase tariffs – this “rebalancing” was likely to take ca. two years. Glenn Earlam asked about the 25% reduction in applications over a 5-year period. It was noted that the applications decline would have been impacted by a number of aspects including the drop in demographic, the strategic realignment of the portfolio and removal of a proliferation of small courses within this. A higher conversion rate had offset this decline to an extent, but Annabel Kiernan agreed that Staffordshire would need to look again at its academic portfolio in order to drive growth through applications not just conversions.
243	<p>The Committee received for discussion a paper on Student progression report (outcomes and attainment) SP/13/08, Pro Vice Chancellor – Education. The following main points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The University continued to be between 5% and 7% below our target in all three KPIs, even though we had seen a 6.8% increase at level 3-4 in 2020/21 in comparison to progression in 2019/20 and a near 3% rise at level 4-5. We were implementing a series of recommendations based on insights gained from discussions with staff and students at our feeder colleges about the challenges faced during the pandemic and how these impacted upon incoming student cohorts at level 3-4. Further detail was given in the report. Initial analysis had taken place to understand the impact of entry tariff and highest qualification on progression at level 4-5. There was correlation between progression and both entry tariff and qualifications. For the sixth consecutive year, the University had seen an increase in good degree rates, with overall rates increasing by nearly 3.5%. When split between full-time and part-time, the rise was due to a 5% rise in full-time good degrees. The University continued to see a large BAME awarding gap (which had increased from 2019/20), with BAME students 16.3% less likely to achieve a good degree (compared to the University average). This increase was due to the awarding gap for Asian students rising from 9% in 2019/20 to 16.8% in 2020/21. It was important to continue to understand the intersectionality of student characteristics in student progression and other outcomes. There was a ‘depressing’ factor for progression for IMD, BAME, WP and commuter student characteristics. The largest two gap factors in progression were IMD and ethnicity, with the intersectionality of these two characteristics proving the most challenging for progression from level 4 to level 5. <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jonathan Chapman asked about the process for meetings to challenge under-performance within Schools, and Liz Barnes confirmed that the full Executive team was usually present at these through the Business Review process and outside of this given the nature and the timing of issues arising.
244	<p>The Committee received for discussion a paper on Student Satisfaction Report SP/13/08, introduced by the Pro Vice Chancellor – Education. The following principal points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The report outlined how the University would use student voice to drive improvements in teaching, learning and the student experience. The two key additions to governance would be an enhanced continuous monitoring process for 2021-22, including a red flag trigger system, and the re-introduction of module-level student evaluation through EvaSys. This approach had been developed in response to the University’s Student Voice Survey results to support achieving the 90% overall

	<p>satisfaction KPI, to introduce lead indicators for NSS and PTES and to have oversight in-year to facilitate early interventions as or where needed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The report also gave updates and detail on the position with the outcome for the National Student Survey (NSS), for PTES (Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey), and for PRES (Postgraduate Research Experience Survey). <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jonathan Chapman asked about low response rates to module evaluation. Annabel Kiernan noted that these evaluations were sometimes seen as onerous, and there were challenges around overcoming this, however it was acknowledged that data science and learner analytics were the science that shaped our strategy and policy.
245	<p>The Committee received for discussion a paper on Graduate outcomes SP/13/09, introduced by the Pro Vice Chancellor – Education, who noted the following main points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This paper sets out the results from the most recent Graduate Outcomes survey and articulates our strategic response. Graduate Outcomes had very significant import as a key performance indicator and better understanding of new GOs methodology would have implications for the portfolio. Work was being undertaken in several areas including target interventions and portfolio review. Early analysis seemed to indicate that a 1% GOS score improvement would mean an 8-place improvement in the GO ranking (estimated to translate to a two-place rise in The Times overall rankings). The strategic approach set out in the second part of this paper identified a number of measures and interventions which would be taken in order to reposition the University's employability approach to deliver on this key metric. <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <p>NONE</p>
246	<p>The Committee received for discussion the League Table Performance Report SP/13/10, introduced by the Deputy Vice Chancellor. The following main points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staffordshire had dropped in two of the three key UK league tables and was now ranked 98th out of 130 institutions in the Complete University Guide; 72nd out of 121 institutions in the Guardian University Guide; and 76th out of 132 institutions in the Times/Sunday Times Good University Guide. Staffordshire University was therefore no longer ranked in the top 50% of any of the three key UK league tables, largely due to changes in methodology that reinforced the traditional hierarchy within the HE sector rather than rewarded institutions on upward trajectories or innovation. The University continued to suffer from the drop in graduate prospects last year (with this data used in the CUG and Guardian) but improvements in this year's results led to a 28-place rise in the specific metric in the Times/Sunday Times Good University Guide (with the University one of only 16 universities to improve its score in this metric). The Committee was asked to note that we had re-energised our approach to ensuring that we fully understood the metrics underpinning league table performance and what was needed to do to get back to being in the top 50%. This was outlined in more detail at the end of the paper. <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jonathan Chapman asked about the correlation between league table rankings and applications. Paul Marshall noted that these were considered particularly important internationally but domestically, they tended to be used more once a decision on courses was made by a prospective student. League tables were less likely to be relied upon where a significant commuter student cohort was present.
3 FOR INFORMATION	
247	The Committee received for information a paper on Research and Innovation Annual Report 2020-21 SP/13/12.
248	The Committee received for information a paper on Research Update on HE sector consultations SP/13/13.
4 ADDITIONAL MATTERS	
249	<p>How have we made a positive impact on our students today?</p> <p>It was highlighted that a continued focus on partnerships, student progression and actions to improve that, and student satisfaction, were all key positive impactors.</p>
250	There were no additional matters .
251	Items to be referred to Board of Governors :

	<p>Approval</p> <p>a) Minute 238 – Committee Terms of Reference 2021/22</p> <p>Information</p> <p>b) Minute 241 - Evaluating delivery of the University’s Strategic Plan – Innovative and Applied Learning SP/13/06</p>
252	Next meeting: 15 February 2022 (Catalyst building, Leek Road)