

COUNCIL MINUTES 27 JUNE 2023
APPROVED BY COUNCIL ON 03 OCTOBER 2023

MEETING OF COUNCIL

Date of meeting: Tuesday 27 June 2023, 14:00 to 16:00
Place of meeting: Hybrid via LSHTM Board Room and ZOOM Video Conference

Present: Don Robert (Chair), Angela Darlington, Liam Smeeth, Sunil Sharma, Nazira Amra, Matt Lee, Mishal Khan, Precious Lunga, Hitesh Patel, Mark Poulton, Diana Layfield, Lindsay Northover, Jocelyn Prudence, Indrani Misra, Effua Usuf, Mohamed Osman and Wyn Morgan.

Apologies: Mike Turner and Kevin Tetteh.

Minutes: Ayisha Govindasamy.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Chair welcomed Wyn Morgan, lead consultant from Halpin Partnerships, who would be observing Council as part of LSHTM's external Governance Effectiveness Review.

1.1. Actions taken by the Chair: None.

1.2. Conflicts of Interest: None declared.

1.3. Minutes of the previous meeting:

Resolved:

1.3.1. Council approved the minutes of its previous meeting held on 23 March 2022, subject to minor amendments provided by Mark Poulton via email prior to the meeting.

2. SPOTLIGHT SESSION:

Received: Council received a presentation from Professor Chris Bonnell & Associate Professor Charles Opondo on the Clinical Trials Unit.

3. REPORTS FROM THE DIRECTOR AND ELECTED MEMBERS OF COUNCIL

3.1. Director's Report

Received: Council received a report on LSHTM's latest events, achievements, and key updates over the past few months. Appended to the Director's report was a summary of internal communications, and a forward plan of internal and external communications for the next 3 months.

Noted:

3.1.1. LSHTM has been rated as the best university in the UK for publishing open access research, for collaborations and for the proportion of academic research with women listed as authors in the 2023 CWTS Leiden Ranking.

3.1.2. The Executive Team were concerned by student numbers as overall applications were significantly below target and this was being closely monitored. This would most likely result in lower student tuition fee income for the upcoming financial year 2023/24.

3.1.3. International students were being restricted in bringing their family over to the UK as part of government visa reforms. LSHTM has objected to this change and it is thought to be detrimental to recruitment and could have a disproportional impact on women who may have more family care commitments.

3.1.4. Industrial action from UCU continues to disrupt activities at LSHTM; the Strike Contingency Group continues to try and minimise the impact of industrial action and the marking and assessment boycott on students.

3.1.5. Derfel Owen has recently taken up the post of LSHTM's Director of Education Services and interviews were taking place next week for the Director of EDI.

3.1.6. The Director recently visited Nagasaki University in Japan where LSHTM has a joint PhD programme and attended an alumni reception in Tokyo.

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3.2. Report from elected staff members of Council

Noted:

3.2.1. Council noted the contents of the report from elected staff members of Council.

3.3. Report from Students' Representative Council President

Noted:

3.3.1. Council noted the contents of the report from the Students' Representative Council and referred the request for additional administrative support for the Students' Representative Council to the Executive Team for consideration.

4. STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

4.1. Strategy Implementation - Alana Luckraft (Head of Strategic Planning) joined for this item.

Noted:

- 4.1.1. LSHTM is progressing plans to convert Tavistock Place 1 into an education hub.
- 4.1.2. The EDI Strategy Action Plan, and Independent Review Recommendations were being delivered.
- 4.1.3. A new behavioural framework was in place which is closely aligned to LSHTM's institutional values.
- 4.1.4. An internal task and finish group had been reviewing LSHTM's employment model, and their recommendations would be reviewed by the Executive Team in the summer.
- 4.1.5. Staff in the UK were adapting to new ways of working and returning to working from LSHTM's offices in line with the Hybrid Working Framework.
- 4.1.6. The Sustainable Impact Fund was recently launched and is going well.
- 4.1.7. The Executive Team were closely monitoring LSHTM's finances as it is aware that reduced student numbers (compared to target) will have an impact on the upcoming academic year. Having a more robust financial position would allow LSHTM to make more strategic investment decisions.
- 4.1.8. Within the scorecard, it was noted that there is an improving percentage of minoritised groups particularly those on grades 7 and 8 in Professional Services, and at Associate Professor level. It was acknowledged that there were still improvements and progress to make to improve the percentage of minoritised groups at the Professor level.
- 4.1.9. It was confirmed that exit interviews were offered to all staff, but that take-up was sporadic. A new exit interview questionnaire had been developed and an annual report on key themes from these would be shared with the People, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Committee for oversight purposes.
- 4.1.10. Council queried what the Director was specifically looking for when recruiting the new Director of EDI role. The new Director would be responsible for providing strategic direction to LSHTM on all EDI matters, managing the EDI team and providing relevant expertise advice and constructive challenge to the Executive Team as a member. Lessons had been learnt from the previous appointment, and input sought from a range of community stakeholders on the revised job description.

4.2. Research Strategy

Received: A presentation from the Pro-Director of Research and Academic Development (Caroline Relton) on the progress and key priorities of the Research Strategy.

Noted:

- 4.2.1. The Research Strategy has eight workstreams which include evaluation of REF 2021 and preparation for the next REF. It articulates LSHTM's research strengths, supporting further research leaders, enhancing the research degree student experience, promotion of knowledge exchange ambitions, and open access practices.

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- 4.2.2. In the 2021 REF exercise, LSHTM did well on impact but scored lower under quality of published outputs.
- 4.2.3. Initial guidance has been released for REF 2028, and there will be more of a focus on impact which may favour LSHTM better.
- 4.2.4. There are ambitions to reduce the number of small grants LSHTM applies for as these are administratively burdensome and often do not provide sufficient overhead costs. A move towards fewer grants from more prestigious funders would alleviate this pressure and hopefully, provide more job security for those on fixed term contracts. It was acknowledged that more early career researchers may still need to apply for smaller grants whilst they are establishing their career, so this would be aimed more generally on those on Without Duration Contracts.
- 4.2.5. Council noted the excellent performance in open access and welcomed opportunities to learn more about LSHTM's research.

5. FUNDRAISING REPORT

Noted:

- 5.1. LSHTM recently received £1m in funding from the Wolfson Foundation in support of the Keppel Street laboratory redevelopment project.
- 5.2. Just over £5.1m has been fundraised for this year and Council believed that LSHTM was capable of raising more funds.

6. FEEDBACK FROM COUNCIL AND STAFF ENGAGEMENT SESSION

Received: A verbal report from Nazira Amra (independent member of Council) on the topics raised following their recent staff and student engagement session.

Noted:

- 6.1. Topics raised by staff and students included:
- Concerns about equality, diversity and inclusion within the student community; specific references to students from high income countries dismissing contributions from students from lower to middle income countries during seminars and lectures.
 - Concern around the disparity in tuition fees between home and international students and the rationale behind this.
- 6.2. There was low uptake from staff and student regarding the Council engagement session, despite promoting the opportunity via a number of internal communication channels. Council engagement sessions would be reviewed as part of the Governance Effectiveness Review. There was a sense that thematic sessions might garner more interest from staff and students.

Resolved:

- 6.3. Council recommended that:
- Unconscious bias training be worked into the Welcome Week programme for new students.
 - Consideration be given as to whether tuition fees could be paid in termly instalments.

7. REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

7.1. Finance & Development Committee

Noted:

- 7.1.1. Council noted the summary report of Finance & Development Committee which was held on the 08 June 2023.

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- 7.1.2. The committee had discussions on resetting the budget for the upcoming academic year so that it was realistic in light of not reaching student recruitment targets and the impact this would have on tuition fee income. There were a number of factors impacting budget setting, such as better than expected REF and investment income, but higher costs related to inflation.
- 7.1.3. The committee would be focusing on whether LSHTM has appropriate plans in place to meet the ambitious student number targets.
- 7.1.4. Council emphasised the importance of surveying applicants who reject their place at LSHTM and gathering intelligence from the existing student community on what factors they considered when applying and accepting a place at LSHTM.
- 7.1.5. There were concerns that if LSHTM was unable to understand the root cause of the reduced student numbers, it would be unable to address the issues for future recruitment cycles.
- 7.1.6. It was thought that inflation, general decline in the economy and the affordability of living in London, played a significant part in the decrease in intensive MSc student numbers. There were also concerns related to the University of London and their ability to market and process Distance Learning student applications.
- 7.1.7. Across the UK Higher Education sector, there has been a reduction in home students and competition within Public Health has increased over the past five years. LSHTM needed to ensure its offer remains distinctive and offers a unique student experience.

Resolved:

- 7.1.8. Council approved the operating and capital budgets and liquidity forecasts for 2023-24.
- 7.1.9. Council agree Finance & Development Committee should conduct a deeper dive into why recruitment was significantly below target and what could be implemented in future recruitment cycles.

7.2. Audit & Risk Committee

Noted:

- 7.2.1. Council noted the summary report of Audit & Risk Committee meeting and away day held on 20 June 2023.
- 7.2.2. The away day focused on high rated risks on the risk register which included student recruitment income, cyber security, and research.
- 7.2.3. There were concerns about the quality of the information presented in the Unit risk registers and that the risks identified were too operational and not aligned to the common risks found in the Faculty(s) and/or the Strategic Risk Register.
- 7.2.4. There were two audit reports which were of significant concern, these were financial controls and the outcome of the Wellcome Audit which highlighted basic financial controls were not in place at the Units. This was flagged to the Executive Team as there were concerns that a general theme was emerging around the lack of controls at the Units, and lack of appropriate oversight from LSHTM. Should there not be significant progress in resolving these concerns, it was recommended that an external review is commissioned.
- 7.2.5. Cyber security remained a very high risk on the Strategic Risk Register, and the IT team were undertaking work to adhere to the cyber assessment framework and strengthen LSHTM's cyber incident plan. The committee recommended the internal Risk Management Group retain close oversight of this strategic risk.
- 7.2.6. Other internal audit report findings showed a general trend of non-compliance with existing LSHTM policies/procedures e.g., Health & Safety, bullying and harassment, staff working overseas for personal reasons. This was also mirrored in the outcomes of the Wellcome Trust audit.
- 7.2.7. The committee approved the internal audit tender specification and evaluation criteria.

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7.3. Nominations Committee

Noted:

- 7.3.1. Following a tender exercise, the Governance Effectiveness Review (GER) Steering Group appointed the Halpin Partnership to carry out Council's external GER.
- 7.3.2. The Halpin Partnership have an established reputation in the Higher Education sector, and their review team had a strong depth of experience and expertise in academic and EDI matters.
- 7.3.3. The Halpin Partnership would be observing a number of Council and Committee meetings, and surveying and interviewing Council and Committee members to help inform their review.
- 7.3.4. The scope of the review will cover:
 - the overall effectiveness of Council and its Committees.
 - how Council assures itself regarding compliance with the Office for Students Ongoing Conditions of Registration and the CUC code of governance.
 - Council's supervision of the Units.
 - How EDI is embedded within the Council and Committee structure.
 - How the student and staff voice is considered in decision making across Council and its Committees.
- 7.3.5. Outcomes of the review will be presented to Council in November 2023.
- 7.3.6. LSHTM continues to engage with its recognised trade unions on its proposal to update its instruments of governance, specifically around the statute concerning academic staff.
- 7.3.7. Engagement has been low so far, but work continues on drafting harmonised policies for all staff on employment issues to help demonstrate what the changes could look like.

Resolved:

- 7.3.8. Council approved the appointment of;
 - Nazira Amra as an Independent Member of Council on People, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Committee.
 - Mark Poulton as an Independent Member of Council on Audit & Risk Committee.
 - Lindsay Northover as the Remuneration Committee Chair and Independent Member of Council on Finance & Development Committee.
 - Ashley Wang as an Independent Co-opted Member of Audit & Risk Committee.

7.4. Senate

Noted:

- 7.4.1. Council noted the summary of Senate which was held on 07 June 2023 and the associated Quality and Academic and Standards Report for the academic year 2021/22.

7.5. People, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee

Noted:

- 7.5.1. Council noted the summary of the inaugural People, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee which was held on 22 June 2023.

8. OTHER REPORTS FOR INFORMATION

Noted:

- 8.1. Council noted the use of the LSHTM Seal for a Gift Aid Covenant for LSHTM Developments.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING: 03 October 2023