Council effectiveness review of 2010

1. In June 2010 all members of Council were asked to complete a questionnaire asking for them to score and comment on Council performance, their own contributions, and the performance and requirements of a Council chairperson. The results were analysed and anonymised by the then College Secretary Katie Kerr, and were presented to Council in October 2010, along with a set of recommendations designed to address areas of concern identified during the review. This process was conducted in accordance with the guidelines of the CUC, and the previous review had been undertaken in 2005.

2. Council was presented with the attached table listing the questions asked with average scores (always out of 4, with 4 representing excellent) and key points noted in members' comments. The numbers in brackets in the 'comments' column represent the number of responses making the same point. Katie Kerr reported to Council that it was evident that some questions were less suitable for numerical scoring than others and some members had declined to offer scores for these.

3. Council was informed that there was a commonly expressed view that it would be valuable to have more information about the academic activity of the College, its weaknesses and strengths and future plans. Council business was reshaped for future meetings to meet this request. Council was also informed that the comments made many references to conflicts of interest and the representation of sectional interests disturbing the perceived effectiveness of Council; a group of Council members was established by Nominations Committee to explore the matter further and report back. The result was that the Conflicts of Interest Policy was examined and modified by this group, with Council ratification in June 2011.

4. A number of other issues were summarised for Council emerging from the survey; these are listed below. Some of these were thoroughly addressed, with recommendations accepted and implemented, but a number remained unresolved when the current review was launched in November 2012; the survey issued in December 2012 was thus explicitly designed to assess whether those issues still required attention. That some issues were not fully resolved in 2010 and 2011 is the result of the College Secretary's office, at that time, being heavily occupied in responding to a number of complex HR and legal cases, and in searching for a new Principal and a new Chair of Council.

5. Issue one: Council accountability and effectiveness - actions and notes arising

5.1: it was decided to deliver a briefing for all Council members on the role of HEI governors at the December 2010 Council away day.

5.2: the committees of Council and the schedule of delegations were reviewed, and a revised Committees Handbook was prepared and accepted by Council.

5.3: performance monitoring against institutional targets was established as routine part of Council's business.

Three suggestions relating to this issue were not fully addressed at the time:

5.4: there was a desire to consider the relation between Council and Academic Board.

5.5: there was a desire to consider how Council can best be informed of stakeholder views.

5.6: there was an approved recommendation that, subject to the normal considerations of confidentiality, Council papers, as well as minutes and agendas, should be published on the intranet following the approval of the minutes at the next Council meeting.

Notes 5.4 and 5.5 are being addressed at the present time through the current Council Effectiveness Review. Note 5.6 was not implemented at the time, but is underway now. Paper authors need to be informed while writing reports for Council that these will be thus published and need to be produced in a format fit for this end. The current work to create a guide for paper authors and a cover sheet for all Council papers is part of the ongoing work within the Secretariat to move to a schedule of paper publication.

6. Issue two: Council composition and meeting progress - actions and notes arising

6.1: the Privy Council asked that Statutes in all universities be reviewed to move nomination rights by external bodies. Royal Holloway's Statutes were modified to remove the right of Runnymede Borough Council following the due process as a result.

6.2: it was recognised that the skills represented and the diversity of members on Council needed to be considered in depth by Nominations Committee, as indeed they were and are.

6.3: some members of Council felt the body was too large to be able to conduct business effectively, but this was not a majority view.

6.4: regular meetings between the Principal, the Chair, and the Secretary were felt to be needed, and were established.

One suggestion was not fully addressed at the time:

6.5: it was felt that consideration should be given to reducing the number of more routine items coming to Council to allow more time for matters of strategic importance.

Note 6.5 is being addressed at the present time through the current Council Effectiveness Review.

7. Issue three: Council information - actions and notes arising

7.1: members asked for papers to be sent in email and by hard copy a week in advance of meetings.

7.2: members asked that tabled papers be avoided where possible though accepted that papers that had been amended might nonetheless need to be tabled.

8. Issue four: Training - actions and notes arising

8.1: all new lay members after this review were offered individual training when joining Council.

8.2: annual training for all Council members became a routine inclusion in the away days.

8.3: the College renewed its commitment to fund governors who wished to attend development days organised by the Leadership Foundation.

In the current review, it has become clear that training needs to be offered to all new members whether lay, staff, or student, and that some comparator universities run induction sessions for groups of new members to allow members to meet and get to know one another.

9. Issue five: Council dynamics - action and notes arising

9.1: members wanted clarity in meetings as to who was a member and who was in attendance. This has been achieved by virtue of the new seating arrangement adopted.

Emm Johnstone, 2 July 2013

SECTION ONE - COUNCIL PERFORMANCE

A	COUNCIL ACCOUNTABILITY/EFFECTIVENESS	Av Score	Comments
1	Does the Council adequately consider the College's overall basic strategy?	2.9	1) Strategic discussion sometimes gets crowded out by the number of items on the agenda. 2) Yes it does via its Corporate plan - Vision etc but elsewhere this can tend to be a paper exercise. 3) There should be more information on the academic side - strengths, weaknesses, future growth. 4) Recently council has been focussed on the strategic implications of Runnymede or St George's - we now need to re-assess. 5) Yes, on an annual basis
2	Does the Council as a whole seem to have a clear understanding of its role and responsibilities?	2.9	1) Confusion about what is delegated to committee meetings and what sits with council (4) 2) Possibly too much focus on finance. 3) Some member focus too much time on the sectional interest they represent. 4) Generally yes, but there seems to be confusion about conflicts of interest 5) Yes, though there are some occasional exceptions, continual self-monitoring is important
3	Does the Council adequately consider the views of staff, students and other stakeholders when determining the College's strategy?	3.1	1) It would be helpful to have more knowledge of staff, student and academic views (5) 2) Recent union views have been an unwelcome distraction
4	Does the Council adequately monitor the College's performance as compared with other University Institutions?	2.9	1) Yes at the top tier level, weaker at faculty review. 2) It does, but we seem to lack objective benchmarks, with the exception of Hefce financial analysis.
5	Does the Council adequately monitor and review the College's overall value for money?	2.9	1) Weak in assessing VFM of faculties. 2) Council's review is high level. 3) Council might be critised for being too concerned about value for money at the expense of other priorities and without considering indirect costs. 4) Council relies on the audit committee and management.

6	Are you content with the way in which detailed monitoring and review of the College's finances, human resources and remuneration policy are discussed in Committees and reported to Council?	2.7	1) Papers submitted to Council and committees are too detailed, summarised overviews would be useful. 2) Some HR matters could have been reported on more effectively - earlier especially the equal pay issue (3). 3) Concerns about Remuneration Committee (3) - improvements under review.
7	Does the review of the Corporate Plan through the use of KPIs enable you to understand and evaluate the College's performance in areas of strategic importance?	2.8	1) Strategic importance is very difficult to assess. 2) Could focus on individual items in more detail - maybe one per meeting.
8	Council papers are currently only available to others on request; the minutes are provided to Academic Board once approved by Council and a copy is held in the College Library. What do you think about publishing all minutes and Council papers on the internet as a matter of course? When should this be done?	2.1	1) Council members will censor what they say at council meetings (2) 2) Definitely yes (6) 3) Only the minutes. 4) Agree for non-confidential papers. 5) Provision of minutes is a major improvement - unsure about internet publication - in principle visibility of Council proceedings could be higher *but* 6) Council members deserve a degree of privacy and confidentiality.
9	Do the reports and minutes from the Audit and Compliance Committee and other College committees provide you with sufficient information for reassurance about systems of control and accountability within the organisation? Is there other information that you would like to see?	3.1	1) Issues which involve a considerable degree of risk, financial or otherwise should be reported in a timely fashion. 2) No. The Committees don't adequately represent academic views since academic staff are no longer members 3) Yes, though Chairs should be encouraged to provide Council with periodic overviews
10	Do you have enough information from the Academic Board for reassurance that the College is managing its academic work appropriately?	2.4	1) Inadequate information on the academic side e.g. strengths, weaknesses, future growth, performance, NSS scores, return on investment in staff (3) 2) Council communication could be looked at further. 3) Better than it used to be

B)	COUNCIL COMPOSITION AND MEETING PROCESS	Av Score	Comments
1	Is the Council the right size?	2.7	1) Too big (5): - too many special interests represented. - but appreciate reduction may be too difficult - but representative - far too many to members to facilitate discussion and decision making. 2) Size is about right but the presence of ex-officio members and observers makes it feel unwieldy. 3) Could be a bit smaller
2	Does the Council have the right mix of characteristics, experiences and skills? In particular, are there Council representatives who can properly cover academic, financial, corporate governance, legal and estate issues?	2.5	1) Legal and financial skills need to be maintained. 2) Need: - Financial (2) - HR (3) - Estates (3) - Academic (2) - Legal (2) - Gender / Diversity (3) 3) Appears to be very strong representation on the financial side 4) Good mix of experience at member level - insufficient specialist support in HR matters from management 5) There are not enough women and younger members and there are no ethnic minorities at all
3	Are there any skills or characteristics you would like to see represented to a greater or lesser degree?	2.4	1) Someone with property / building experience to question capital spend plans. 2) Gender / Diversity (2) 3) Business development skills required (2) 4) Fundraising experience 5) Greater experience of the HE sector in terms of academia and the student experience (2), local business people are good but may not bring enough additional knowledge to Council. 6) Fewer accountants - more representatives from public life. 7) Good mix of experience at member level - insufficient specialist support in HR matters from management. 8) Prominence / Leadership

4	Are there an appropriate number of Council meetings?	3.3	1) Yes, although it is tempting to increase the number in order to reduce the length of each meeting, this would result in more lengthy meetings. Extra committees create more pressure on staff for paperwork. Better to reduce Council membership to 14 and develop more effective committees. 2) Yes, at 4 per annum but given the matters of business it would be worth considering more
5	Are meetings long enough to permit proper evaluation of all agenda items, and is the time used effectively?	2.7	1) Early agenda items can take up too much time - important matters should be first on agenda 2) Earlier start time needed - final papers not always dealt with effectively. 3) Some discussions can become repetitive and can get bogged down on issues / problems not relevant to the council meeting (3) 4) Some seem to have a poor grip of conflict of interest issues. 5) Time could be used more effectively. 6) The last one was long enough! 7) Yes, but recent meetings have been too busy
6	Do you feel that Council members adequately understand their role?	2.7	1) Some people have a tendency to represent their own sectional interest only and trivial issues (3) 2) Lack of detailed understanding of importance of quality (academic research and teaching) in top universities. 3) Yes, though it is an interactive process
7	Are the matters that come to Council the right ones?	3.2	1) They seem to be the matters that various members of the Executives want to bring - process of weeding some out needed. 2) There should be more discussion on the academic and E.O. issues. 3) Some reports from sub-committees could be noted more briefly. 4) The bigger legal cases might be noted in RAB so that Council is aware of feasible risks and associated issues. 5) Yes, the right ones comes for decision - the next challenge is to get the right papers for information
8	When urgent matters arise between scheduled Council meetings, are there adequate procedures in place for dealing with them?	3.1	1) The contributions of some members seem to be of a very high standard. 2) Difficult because there are so many to consult. 3) Yes, through extra committee meetings
9	Do you think it is beneficial for council to hold away-days or other forms of reflective discussions?	3.5	1) Yes, though I would have liked to have had feedback about actions taken following discussions at Kingswood.

C)	COUNCIL INFORMATION	Av Score	Comments
1	Is the information provided prior to a Council meeting adequate to enable you to understand and evaluate agenda items?	3.0	1) Sometimes there is so much that it's hard to digest - more succinct papers with clear recommendations would help. 2) Papers need to be issued earlier. 3) Minutes of some committees are obtuse - referring to papers that were not included without summarising the issue. 4) The quality of the papers is very high
2	Is information received in time to allow you to prepare properly for the meeting?	2.3	1) Papers should be issued together at least one week before meeting (6) 2) Should be a cut-off point after which late papers are not included. 3) Tabled papers should be avoided
3	Is the time appropriately allocated between management presentation and Council discussions?	3.0	
4	Is management responsive to requests for clarification or amplification?	3.1	1) Can be silent unless pressed.
5	What, in your view, are the high-risk issues which deserve closest attention?	3.0	1) Finance - costs (8) 2) Academic (4) - strategy - reputation, risk of becoming overly reliant on one sector or nationality. 3) Implication and response to funding cuts (3) 4) Student numbers (2) 5) Estate - facilities (2) 6) Sector Issues - government funding / pensions 7) Stakeholder satisfaction 8) Performing below target levels in the university rankings 9) Hefce funding, particularly QR. 10) Strategic assessment of our academic objectives 11) Reputational issues e.g. disputes - staff and student opinion, morale and satisfaction. 12) Growing number of HR disputes, equal pay issues, over stretching of management
6	Does the Council pay sufficient attention to the high profile risk issues that could have a significant impact on the College?	2.7	1) Sometimes gets crowded out by sheer weight of number of items on the agenda. 2) Not enough on the Academic side. 3) Understanding of complex financial risks hinder council's ability to measure how much attention should be paid to issues. 4) Yes, but many of the issues are for management to manage

7	Do you have sufficient access to management and College officers outside Council meetings?	3.3	
8	Do you think that the deliberations of the Council provide helpful advice and guidance to the work of College officers?	3.1	1) Yes, though sometimes Council's advice is taken out of context by management.
9	Is there enough support for the Council from the College and the Secretary?	3.2	

D)	TRAINING	Av Score	Comments
1	Do you consider that on appointment you were given sufficient training/information on the College, Council processes and your role and responsibility as a Council member to enable you to contribute effectively?	2.8	1) An induction course would have been helpful (4)
2	Are there areas on which you would like further training/information?	3.0	1) Would be useful to be receive government updates - changes 2) Effective contribution to the Audit committee 3) Hefce funding 4) Understanding the academic performance at faculty level 5) Equality / diversity issues
3	Do you consider that since appointment the College has kept you sufficiently up to date with developments that affect your responsibilities as a member of Council?	3.2	
4	Have you been kept sufficiently up to date with other developments generally that affect the College?	3.3	1) Yes, though own efforts
5	Do you have any other thoughts or comments on better ways of meeting and getting briefed by the Academic and Professional Departments?		1) Would be useful for Council to have more input on academic matters which may require a rebalanced council. 2) Would be good to have a tour - meet the HoD's / departments to build up a better understanding (4) 3) Would like an overall presentation on academic side, plus individual presentations from different departments (2) 4) Invitation to faculty meetings 5) More contact between council members, staff and students "at the coal face" is desirable (meetings / visits to departments) 6) More input from HR would be valuable

E)	COUNCIL DYNAMICS	Av Score	Comments
1	Are Council meetings conducted in a way that ensures open communication, meaningful participation by all members and that allows for civil disagreement and critical questioning?	2.9	1) Would work better with fewer attendees 2) Union observers inhibit free and full discussion - council members should have time at the start of the meeting on their own. 3) Some nervousness at times by management inhibits discussion. 4) Some members seem as though they don't comment due to consistent views of other members or follow the Chairman 5) Difficult to balance open discussion and the length of meetings
2	Does the Council atmosphere encourage critical thinking and open and candid discussion?	2.7	1) Some members do not hold back but the atmosphere is usually gentle. 2) Yes, but the presence of elected members with union responsibilities is undermined by an inhibiting fraction
3	Does the Council atmosphere allow members to take reasoned independent positions?	2.8	1) Yes, though this is not always comfortable. 2) Yes, that was evident from the merger discussions
4	Are relationships between Council members such that the Council functions harmoniously?	3.0	1) Up to now yes. However, I am concerned that Council may become impotent if we have to face industrial action. We need a notus operanda to deal with this.
5	Do you feel comfortable with the presence of union observers or does this inhibit free and full discussion?	3.1	1) SMT seems to have a problem with UCU 2) Very comfortable - this is a good thing/helpful 3) As long as they understand their role. 4) With the difficult financial times ahead the presence of union observers may restrict honest and open discussions. 5) There should be no observers - those with a specific paper for discussion should be present during that discussion
6	Should we make more use of Restricted Business discussions without attendees?	N/A	1) Attendees are usually able to provide specialised information or knowledge. 2) Prefer a full and open discussion. 3) Yes (2), particularly because of size 4) No