UNIVERSITY OF FORWARD THINKING WESTMINSTER⊞

APPROVED

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF ACADEMIC COUNCIL HELD ON WEDNESDAY 15 OCTOBER 2025 IN CHILTERN HALL, MARYLEBONE BUILDING

PRESENT:

Professor Peter Bonfield (Chair)	Frantzeska Kolyda
Jessica Adebanjo	Professor Andrew Linn
Professor Dibyesh Anand	Adil Musani
David Burt (Clerk)	Jeanette Nicholas
Anne-Gaelle Colom	Kaushika Patel (from Minute 25.1.11)
Neil Donohue	Dr Andy Pitchford
Professor Catherine Dormor (from Minute 25.1.10)	Henryetta Simpson
	Dr Margherita Sprio
Emma Elkington	Dr Pinar Uysal Onganer
Amber Ella	Ian Wilmot
Professor Christos Kalantaridis	
Dr Paul Kendall	

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mark Baldwin (Minute 25.3)	Maja Jovic (Observer)
Kitty Brown (Minute 25.3)	Amina Mahmood (Observer)
Mandy Chan (Secretary)	Elaine McMillan (Clerk to the Court)
Linsey Cole (Observer) (withdrew for Minutes 25.2.2 to 25.2.5)	Kerri Mills[1] (Observer) (from Minute 25.1.10)
Naleena Gururani (Observer) (from Minute 25.3)	Shehma Shabbir (Observer) (from Minute 25.1.2)

APOLOGIES:

Dr Felicity Hardley	Dr Natasha Whiteman
Sruthi Konda	

25.1 ANNOUNCEMENTS

25.1.1 The Chair welcomed all members and attendees, with a particular welcome extended to the following new members and observers:

- Neil Donohue – Director of Student and Academic Services (ex-officio member)
- Anne-Gaelle Colom – Elected academic representative of College of Design, Creative and Digital Industries
- Adil Musani – President of the University of Westminster Students' Union (UWSU) (ex-officio member)
- Linsey Cole – Director of Business Engagement and Graduates Future (BEGF). The role is proposed to be added to the membership as an ex-officio member subject to Court of Governors approval on 26 November 2025 (Minutes 25.2.3 and 25.2.5).
- Naleena Gururani and Shehma Shabbir – independent governors observing the meeting and contributing to discussions on the annual quality and standards report (Minute 25.4) to provide assurance to the Court about Council's consideration of the report.
- Maja Jovic and Amina Mahmood – Participants of Academic Council Shadowing Scheme

25.1.2 All members and attendees introduced themselves.

25.1.3 Members noted apologies as detailed above.

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[1] Kerri Mills - Managing Director, Customer Care, Barclays UK - attended the meeting as a guest of Professor Catherine Dormor. The Chair confirmed and approved her attendance as an observer of the meeting.

25.1.4   The Chair informed members that the Academic Council Shadowing Scheme has extended to support the professional development of doctoral researchers, and three colleagues and one doctoral researcher are appointed to the scheme this year.

25.1.5   The Chair informed members he would invite a member to contribute a reflection on the meeting to his next Vice-Chancellor's Blog.

25.1.6   The Director (BEGF) declared an interest in agenda item 5b regarding the proposed addition of the role to the membership as an ex-officio member of Academic Council (Minutes 25.2.2, 25.2.3 and 25.2.5).

25.1.7   The Chair confirmed that there were no requests to discuss starred agenda items (Minutes 25.8 to 25.10).

25.1.8   The Chair confirmed that there were no requests to raise other matters not on the agenda.

25.1.9   The Chair reminded members of the procedural requirements for un-starring items and raising other matters not on the agenda. The Chair also reiterated the remit of Academic Council and emphasised the importance of inclusive meeting conduct, ensuring all participants are actively listened to and views are respected.

25.1.10   In response to a member's query on the rules around absence of elected members, the Chair noted that the Academic Council Standing Orders outline the procedures for notifying absence and, where relevant, nominating an alternate. The Chair reminded members that those unable to attend meetings should read the papers and share their views in advance, if possible.

Chair's report

25.1.11   The Chair briefed members on sector and institutional issues and developments since the last meeting, including:

- The external policy environment and Government support for the sector.
- Student recruitment trends and associated financial pressure across the sector.
- Institutional performance and outcomes in the ranking tables.
- Graduate employment, the evolving labour market and the opportunities arising from Artificial Intelligence.
- The University's research activities and the strengthening research culture.
- Progress of the mid-term review of the Being Westminster strategy.
- The new freedom of speech legislation and the University's commitments to inclusion and open dialogues.

25.1.12   The Chair noted that, despite sector challenges, the University has performed well in student recruitment and reaffirmed the importance of sustaining momentum through collective efforts, building on institutional strengths and values to support continued progress.

25.2   GOVERNANCE MATTERS

Code of Conduct

25.2.1   **AGREED** Members reaffirmed their commitment to the Code of Conduct (Document AC 251015A).

Terms of Reference and Membership

25.2.2   The Chair invited the Director (BEGF) to leave the room during the discussion of the item to avoid conflict of interest (Minute 25.1.6).

25.2.3 The Chair informed members that the proposed changes to the terms of reference and membership (Document AC 251015B) are intended to highlight Council's oversight of employability.

25.2.4 The Chair appointed Professor Catherine O'Connor, the designated Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Education who will assume office in November 2025, as the Deputy Chair of Academic Council.

25.2.5 **AGREED** Terms of reference and membership 2025-26 to be recommended to the Court for approval.

Schedule of Business

25.2.6 The Chair informed members that the schedule of business is a living document, which will be adapted as needed to address any emerging priorities in fulfilling Council's responsibilities.

25.2.7 **AGREED** Members confirmed that the activities on the schedule of business 2025-26 (Document AC 251015C) fulfil the responsibilities of Academic Council as outlined in the terms of reference.

Sub-committee Terms of Reference

25.2.8 **APPROVED** Updated terms of reference and membership for the Teaching Committee (Document AC 251015D) to be implemented with immediate effect.

25.3 STUDENT EXPERIENCE AND EMPLOYABILITY

25.3.1 Kitty Brown - Director of Strategy, Planning and Performance (SPP) - presented the National Student Survey (NSS) results report (Document AC 251015Ei) and the Graduate Outcomes report (Document AC 251015Eii), highlighting continuous improvements in NSS performance and emphasising the need for collaborative efforts to ensure consistency and close the gaps between different student groups.

25.3.2 Mark Baldwin - Executive Director of Performance, Improvement and Innovation (PII) - reported positive progress in student experience, noting that some of the outcomes exceeded sector benchmarks. The Executive Director attributed this success to the University's sustained and coordinated efforts and reaffirmed the commitment to ongoing success through robust strategies and good practices.

25.3.3 The Executive Director (PII) and Andy Pitchford - Head of Centre for Teaching and Education Innovation - led a workshop comprising a deep-dive discussion on the three key areas supporting student experience and employability: academic support and personal tutoring, marking and feedback, and employment. A summary of the discussion is provided below.

- Importance of meaningful colleague-student connections and consistent personal tutoring.
- Better integration of employability sessions with module content to enhance engagement.
- Academic support should be accessible, empathetic and aligned with student needs.
- Students prefer app-based communication over email; potential development of engagement apps suggested.
- Linking Access and Participation Plan priorities to graduate outcomes.
- Good practices exist but overall league table ranking remains low.
- Data-driven tools recommended to monitor attendance and engagement.
- Systematic collection and use of student data to address participation barriers collaboratively with the UWSU.

25.3.4 The Executive Director (PII) concluded that there is a consensus on the need for improved information technology and data tools, and for better integration of employability with academic provisions and personal tutoring. The Executive Director also acknowledged that academic support is a university-wide issue that may require strategic review or radical changes, with insights from the discission to inform ongoing planning and student support development.

25.3.5   Reflecting on the workshop discussion, the Chair observed that academic support and data use are key to enrich the student experience and will inform the mid-term review of the Being Westminster strategy scheduled for this academic year.

25.3.6   The Chair proposed that Academic Council discuss the mid-term review at its next meeting, emphasising Council's role in setting and prioritising strategic objectives, and in aligning data and actions to ensure their successful delivery.

25.3.6.1 **ACTION Academic Council Secretary** to include mid-term review on the agenda for the next Council meeting on 3 December 2025.

25.3.7   The Chair highlighted the strategic importance of having the right data to inform decision-making and outlined a plan to broaden employment data collection to ensure support for all students. The Chair also noted that recent sector-wide student feedback on employability support placed the University near the top of the ranking.

25.4   ANNUAL QUALITY AND STANDARDS REPORT

25.4.1   The Chair reminded members that two governors were in attendance to participate in the discussion of the report on behalf of the Court.

25.4.2   Jessica Adebanjo - Deputy Registrar (Quality and Standards) - presented the annual quality and standards report (Document AC 251015F), which is recommended by the Teaching Committee to provide assurance to Academic Council and the Court regarding compliance with the relevant Office for Students' ongoing conditions of registration.

25.4.3   The Chair suggested that members have some general discussion on the report and encouraged them to email feedback on the four questions outlined in the paper to the Deputy Registrar after the meeting.

25.4.4   Members commended the report and expressed the following views:

- The first two questions highlighted the collective responsibility to promote equitable student engagement, access and participation, and the need for partnership to maximise impact.
- Question three emphasised sharing good practice, while also highlighting the need for the University to use retrospective data effectively to guide future actions, address gaps and improve outcomes.
- Question four encouraged forward-looking thinking beyond compliance and served as a prompt for innovation.

25.4.5   A governor thanked the Deputy Registrar for the pre-meeting briefing on the report and praised the report's high quality and insightful analysis, highlighting clear linkage of data to ongoing University activities, including issues around academic support discussed under the previous agenda item.

25.4.6   The Chair emphasised that the academic quality process guides the University's ongoing governance and actions beyond quality assurance, noting that the annual quality and standards report identifies priority areas for performance improvement, which will inform the forthcoming mid-term review.

25.4.7   Building on the report discussion, the Chair noted that alongside academic support identified under the previous agenda item, equity and closing gaps are also key priorities that will guide the mid-term review.

25.4.8   **AGREED** Members confirm to the Court that the assurance statements have been met.

25.5   MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING

25.5.1   **AGREED** Members confirmed the minutes of Academic Council meeting held on 25 June 2025 (Document AC 251015G) were an accurate record of the meeting.

25.5.2   Members noted the summary of progress against actions arising from the previous meeting (Document AC 251015H) and confirmed the completed items.

25.6   ANY OTHER BUSINESS

25.6.1   Members did not raise any other matters for discussion.

25.7   MEETING EVALUATION

25.7.1   Participants shared the following feedback on the meeting:

- Small conclusions led to larger insights, enhancing understanding of Council's role and work.
- Enjoyable experience with appreciation for colleagues' contributions and good quality papers and operations.
- Diverse perspectives, including academic and professional services colleagues and students, enriched discussions and supported objectives.
- Unlike similar committees at other institutions, the inclusion of a workshop and in-depth discussion were particularly valued.

25.8   STUDENT DISCIPLINARY PANEL AND MEMBERSHIP 2025-26

25.8.1   **APPROVED** Student Disciplinary Panel membership 2025-26 (Document AC 251015I) to be implemented from October 2025.

25.9   INTERNAL AUDIT ASSURANCE REVIEW REPORT – STUDENT CONTINUATION

25.9.1   Members noted the internal audit assurance review report on student continuation (Document AC 251015J), which provided reasonable assurance that appropriate plans, measures and controls are in place for retention of students and for effective management of risks identified around student continuation.

25.10   DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

All meetings start at 1.45pm and take place in Chiltern Hall, Marylebone campus.

Wednesday 3 December 2025
Wednesday 25 February 2026
Wednesday 15 April 2026
Wednesday 24 June 2026