

# UCP COUNCIL

20 March 2025

4:30 PM - 6:00 PM

Hybrid - In person at IEG Boardroom, Peterborough or option to join by Google Meet

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## ATTENDANCE

### COUNCIL MEMBERS

Matthew Bradbury	<a href="#">(Online)</a>
Dr Alison Davies	<a href="#">(Online)</a>
David Dixon	
Sir Les Ebdon	(Chair)
Tony Keeling	<a href="#">(Online)</a>
Kirsty Marfleet	(HE Student Officer)
Rachel Nicholls	
Louise Perry	
Rachel Pishorn	(HE Staff Officer) <a href="#">(Online)</a>
Peter Walker	
Mark Woods	<a href="#">(Online)</a> (Items 1 – 7)

### ATTENDEES

Liz Knight	
Dan Lee	<a href="#">(Online)</a>
Jane Spurgin	(for Governance Director)

### APOLOGIES

Sameena Aziz

## 1. UCP COUNCIL MEETING - PART 1 - WELCOME

Standing item

Speaker: Chair

- (a) **Apologies for absence.** Apologies received from Sameena Aziz
- (b) **Eligibility, quorum and declarations of interest:** No new notice had been received of any Member becoming ineligible to hold office, the meeting was quorate and no interests were declared.
- (c) **Requests for urgent business:** None received

## 2. MINUTES

Decision item

Speaker: Chair

- (a) Minutes of the last meeting (05.12.24): The Minutes of the previous meeting were approved for signature. **(ACTION 1)**
- (b) Matters arising from the minutes: There were no matters arising
- (c) Actions arising from the minutes: Completed and the Council noted that Action 15 (development of 3-year financial plan) is in progress. It was requested and agreed that the draft minutes of UCP Council meetings be circulated promptly to member once approved by the Chair **(ACTION 2)**
- (d) Minutes from Academic Board (28.02.25) – draft: Noted
- (e) Minutes from Audit Committee (05.03.25) – draft: Noted

## 3. PR, MARKETING AND OUTREACH STRATEGY

Information item

Speaker: Group Manager for Marketing & Comms

The Group Manager for Marketing & Comms presented a report on the Marketing and Outreach Strategy for UCP, advising on the following approaches:

Brand Awareness & PR:

- Increasing PR engagement across social channels.
- Capitalising on UCP's unique selling points (history, faculty, alumni, support, reputation).
- Exploiting external validation (TEF Silver, NSS ratings, high achievement).
- Supporting non-traditional marketing events to highlight community connections.

Digital Marketing:

- Prioritizing digital marketing due to low open event attendance by enrolled students.
- Enhancing website SEO, social media advertising, and content marketing.
- Implementing targeted marketing for specific demographics and subjects.
- Marketing HTQs to employers.
- Tracking and evaluating all digital marketing activity.
- Streamlining the application experience via CRM and data optimization.
- Expanding on-site experiences to online platforms (webinars).

Outreach / School Liaison:

- Improving engagement with schools to encourage local progression.
- Hosting careers advisor networking events and workshops.
- Attending numerous careers fairs.
- Conducting "Beyond the Prospectus" school taster days.

Progression:

- Implementing targeted marketing campaigns within Peterborough and Stamford Colleges.
- Engaging Level 3 students and parents with taster activities and information events.
- Surveying Level 3 students on UCP awareness and progression.
- Building a UCP careers hub at Peterborough College.
- Increasing progression from Stamford College, improving progression from Peterborough College.

Responding to UCAS Trends:

- Adapting to market trends and student behaviour.
- Investing in "keep-warm" marketing due to increased "mind-changers."
- Focussing resources on digital marketing.

Improved Reporting & ROI:

- Implementing measures to track conversion and ROI.
- Analysing open event and applicant day data to improve effectiveness.
- Addressing conversion challenges.

The Council explored the following with the Group Manager for Marketing & Comms:

Marketing and Digital Strategy:

- Emphasis on digital marketing and website optimization.
- Recognition of strong online presence (e.g., top ranking for Peterborough University).
- Need to better highlight accreditations and partnerships on the website (e.g., OU, TEF 2023 Silver; Code Institute; etc) (**ACTION 3**).
- The importance of data analysis to understand marketing effectiveness.

Student Recruitment and Progression:

- Concerns about low event attendance and application conversion rates.
- Focus on improving progression from Level 3 students to higher education.
- Efforts to increase engagement through taster days and open events.
- Addressing the different needs of various student types (UCAS ready, mature students).
- Analysis of competitor institutions (Lincoln, Bedford, ARU).
- Successfully going into schools to promote local university option.
- Concern that over 50% of level 3 IEG students are not applying to university.
- Gender division noted in applications, with Males static/declining.

Key Issues and Recommendations:

- Focus on improving brand awareness and defining UCP's unique selling proposition (USP).
- Analysing the effectiveness of marketing spending.
- Leveraging the £500 bursary as a strong incentive.
- Understanding the changing landscape of student demand (e.g., increased interest in apprenticeships, concerns about student debt).
- Gathering more qualitative data from students to improve conversion rates.
- The need to adapt language and branding flexibly to better suit the target audience.
- Further addressing the needs of mature students with flexible timetables.

Members **noted** the interesting report and thanked the Group Manager for Marketing & Comms for the informative and excellent conversation. The marketing activities in train to improve applications to UCP were **welcomed**.

## 4. ACADEMIC DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Standing item

Speaker: Academic Director

The Council received report from the Academic Director covering the following key points:

Office for Students (OfS) and Regulatory Compliance:

- Freedom of Speech Act: UCP must implement new duties, including securing freedom of speech, banning NDAs for harassment victims, creating free speech codes, and promoting freedom of speech.
- Fee Increases: Inflationary fee increases have been communicated to students and the OfS, requiring updates to Access and Participation fee limits.
- Access and Participation Plan: A new plan for 2026-2030 must be submitted by July 31, 2025, involving student consultation and addressing equality of opportunity barriers. Failure to have an approved plan will limit fee charging. The Academic Board will review this plan before it comes to the Council. (**ACTION 4**)
- Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE): New guidance has been issued, with the LLE launching in 2026/27. UCP's OU curriculum is aligned with 30-credit modules, but Pearson HTQs are not.
- Interim Financial Return (F3): UCP must submit an interim financial return by 10<sup>th</sup> April 2025, due to OfS's increased financial monitoring.

ARU Teach Out:

- ARU student records are complete, and IT access will be closed.
- The ARU teach-out was completed ahead of schedule, with no student complaints or requests for compensation, resulting in congratulations for the staff.
- Formal legal communications regarding this are forthcoming.

Student Numbers and Plans:

- Student recruitment is below target due to disappointing January recruitment.
- Specific courses faced recruitment challenges (Counselling, Adult Social Care, HTQs).
- Level 2 Counselling to begin in September 2025.
- Under recruitment leads to the need for cost savings.

Open University Validations:

- Degree Apprenticeship validations are underway for four strands.
- BEng Electrical and Mechanical top-up degrees are being validated.
- Failure to validate will harm recruitment, reputation and finances.

Degree Apprenticeship Wave 3 Project and HTQ SIF2:

- Degree Apprenticeships: Curriculum validation is on track, VLE development approved, APAR registration delayed, employer engagement ongoing.
- HTQ Project: New grant agreements signed, spend deadline extended, final finance returns required, learner number starts reported.

Progression Events and Positive News Stories:

- Various events held and planned, including employer engagement, cultural events, and school outreach.
- Student achievements highlighted (journalism, design work).
- Graduation is planned for 11<sup>th</sup> September 2025.

Members discussed the following aspects of the report:

Fee Increase:

- Students arriving in 2025/26 and current students were informed of the inflationary fee increase, which was accepted and understood.
- Student feedback indicated no complaints regarding the fee increase, and appreciation for the clear communication.

Course Performance and Validation:

- The Management Bachelor course performed better than expected, although students showed less interest in HTQs.
- The BEng top-up program saw success with 24 students and received 6 commendations.
- The first degree apprenticeship validation was completed with positive feedback and 5 commendations. Two more validations are scheduled for next week.
- Promotion of these courses is dependent on validation approvals.

Community Engagement and Brand Building:

- Efforts to establish connections with the community and build the brand were acknowledged as valuable.

Student Feedback and Research:

- Student feedback was positive and encouraging.
- A large research project undertaken by Nene Park Trust on creative writing provision across the UK was completed.

Project Milestones and Financials:

- There are no clawbacks on Wave 3 project milestones and UCP is working towards delivery of those standards.
- Student satisfaction regarding the courses was reported as positive

The Council **expressed congratulations** on the high amount of validation activity, **thanked** the Academic Director for her report and **noted** the developments.

## 5. REVIEW OF THE CURRICULUM PLAN AND ACADEMIC OFFER

Decision item

Speaker: Academic Director/Chief Finance Officer

The Council was invited to approve the curriculum direction outlined within the HE Curriculum Offer – 3-year view report as it will determine the academic character of the institution. The key points considered are outlined below:

Strategic Drivers:

- Student demand and recruitment for financial stability.
- Employer demand and apprenticeship levy reform.

- Curriculum innovation and efficiency (30-credit modules, blended/online delivery).
- Open University (OU) institutional and course revalidation.
- Government priorities and Level 4/5 skills focus.
- Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) and modular study.
- Partnerships and collaboration.
- Quality and student experience (OfS focus).

#### Timelines:

- 24/25: Degree apprenticeship development and HTQ launch.
- 25/26: OU institutional review, phase 1 course revalidation, modular LLE curriculum, first OU Masters validation.
- 26/27: OU phase 2 course revalidation, first LLE funded courses.

#### Key Considerations:

- HE planning differences (OfS 5-year cycle, 18-month course development).
- Competition Market Authority guidelines.
- Stamford vs. Peterborough differences (competitors, demographics).
- Validation costs and institutional autonomy.
- Internal progression from college and apprentices.
- Multiple validation partners to reduce risk and improve time to market.

#### Opportunities:

- Green Technology curriculum development.
- Health/NHS collaboration.
- Alignment with IEG apprenticeship offer.
- Alignment of adult FE modular study with HE level 4/5 for LLE.
- Opportunity of alignment with Anglia Professional Training (APT) for accredited programs.
- Expansion of Access to HE routes.
- Introduction of blended and online delivery.
- LLE application to level 6 from 2027/28 (modular full-time degrees).

#### Review:

- Analyse HTQ Digital Technologies performance.
- Potentially replace BA Acting with a broader performing arts program or Higher National.

#### Stop:

- BSc Biological Sciences, BA History and Archaeology, and reduce business/education pathways.
- Post 26/27, exit HNC/HTQ market for Sport and return to degree offer.

Members discussed the proposals and considered the following, that:

- There has been a strategic review of UCP's offerings, considering government targets, employer needs, and student demand, which is complex.
- Infilling and integration are identified as cost-effective opportunities.
- The upcoming OU revalidations provide a chance for program review

- The review has raised questions about the optimal partnership model (OU vs. BGU) and explored higher apprenticeships and lifelong learning (LLE) as potential growth areas.
- There are substantial costs associated with validations (£430k this year) and it was suggested that UCP explore the potential benefits of degree-awarding powers. **(ACTION 5)**
- Assurance was provided by the CCO regarding the strength of curriculum planning, particularly in pathways from FE to HE.

The CEO further:

- Asserted that UCP cannot maintain its current operational model and must rationalize, reshape, and refocus to ensure sustainability as a higher education institution.
- Acknowledged that universities nationwide are facing difficult decisions, particularly in expensive subjects and humanities, which are experiencing declining student demand.
- Advocated for immediate action to discontinue certain programs, rather than delaying decisions.
- Sought Council approval to authorize management to proceed with program of discontinuation and realignment.
- Stressed the urgency of decisions, highlighting the lag time in higher education planning and the risk of contract breaches.
- Highlighted the need to reduce spending with the OU. Management to enter into conversations with the OU to renegotiate validation fees given the reduction in UCP student numbers **(ACTION 6)**
- Expressed confidence that management is best positioned to make these decisions.

Following discussion, The Council **approved** the broad curriculum direction outlined within the HE Curriculum Offer – 3-year view report and agreed that the identified courses proposed be discontinued **(ACTION 7)**.

## 6. TUITION FEE POLICY 2026/27

Decision item

Speaker: Chief Finance Officer/Academic Director

The Council was requested to approve the 2025/26 Fees Policy and provide approval for the 2026/27 fees presented to be included in three-year plans being modelled for the June UCP Council meeting approval.

In considering the fees presented, Members noted the following:

25/26 Fee Policy:

- Approval is sought for the 2025/26 fee policy, required to include the inflationary fee increase approved in December 2024.
- Details were provided about the courses affected by the fee increase, impacting both new and continuing students.
- The policy is already displayed on the website due to CMA and Access and Participation Plan requirements.

2026/27 Fee Policy Considerations (to be reviewed and approved in June 2025):

- Fee Increase: request to review and approve a potential fee increase for degrees and HNC/Ds, considering inflation (e.g., a £250 increase per degree, or a £500 total increase for new entrants, making a standard degree £9,000).
- Modular Costs: request to review modular costs in relation to the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE), with fees pro-rata based on credits studied.
- Degree Apprenticeship End Point Assessment Charges: guidance on these charges to be included, aligning with the IEG Apprenticeship Policy, particularly regarding resit funding.

Important Dates and Financial Impact:

- The prospectus, UCAS, and Student Finance will launch in May 2025 for 2026/27 recruitment.
- A £250 fee increase would generate an additional £100k in income, assuming over 400 students are impacted.

Members discussed that:

- The fees presented reflect the fact that decisions about 2026/27 fees must be made now as the 2026/27 offer will be launched in April/May.
- There has been nuanced mapping about demand, where increases are possible/acceptable and where things are price sensitive.
- Numerous institutions are increasing fees
- There is a need to do increase fees to protect the quality of provision and reduce the need to find costs savings.

Following discussion on the proposed fees, the Council **approved:**

- 2025/26 fees: increase of £500 for new students in 2025/26 with 3% inflationary increase for second/third year students;
- the 2026/27 fees as presented, in advance of the next Fees Policy review.

## 7. UCP STRATEGY 2025-2030 - UPDATE

Information item      Speaker: Academic Director

Members received a verbal update and were advised that the strategy is in development and will be brought to the Council in June, reflecting the direction being set. **(ACTION 8)**

*(Mark Wood left the meeting)*

## 8. UCP FINANCE REPORT

Discussion item      Speaker: Chief Finance Officer

The Council received the UCP Finance Report 2024/25 (Period 6), a debt analysis position and details relating to the HTQ Grant clawback risk. It was noted that:

### **Management Accounts - Finance Report P6**

Year-to-Date Performance:



- Operating surplus is £114k, £182k below budget.
- This is due to a £269k reduction in student fees, partially offset by increased grant income, reduced pay costs (£33k), and savings in validations and marketing.

#### Forecast:

- Full-year forecast is now a £117k deficit (worst-case scenario) – January recruitment targets not met.
- This is primarily due to £514k less tuition fee income than planned.
- Mitigated significantly by a £490k in-year grant for degree apprenticeship development
- Trying to achieve a balanced position this year.
- Things are really tight in FE and HE across the UK.

#### Potential Mitigations for 2024/25 Gap:

- OfS Grant: Expected £30k-£40k from the £16M grant fund for Level 4/5 provision (HTQs).
- Contractual Provision Release: Potential release of £60k provision related to a pre-2020 contractual dispute, pending due diligence.
- Further review of non-pay costs and management recharges is ongoing.

#### Capital Expenditure:

- HTQ funds (£505k) are on track for full utilization by the March deadline.
- OfS capital allocation (£49k) is planned for utilization by the March deadline.

#### Balance Sheet:

- The balance sheet shows a healthy net asset position year-to-date.
- The year-end forecast anticipates a similar or reduced net asset position, incorporating the revised deficit.
- The deficit is anticipated to be closed over the next few months.

The CFO further advised that she had received news today regarding the government undertaking to cover the NI increase in colleges, that HE providers are to be excluded from this. It was noted however that this information has not yet been published.

As requested by the Council, a debt analysis report was presented. It was noted that:

#### Prior Years' Debt:

- At the end of 2023/24, the bad debt provision was £415k, accumulated over several years.
- Efforts are ongoing to reduce this, through collection or write-offs.
- By 31<sup>st</sup> January, the prior year debt provision was £351k, with:
  - £262k with a debt collection partner.
  - £88.5k on instalment plans.

#### Current Year's Debt (2024/25):

- Total debt is £1,961k.
- £1,628k is owed by the Student Loans Company (SLC) and is considered collectable, assuming students remain enrolled.
- £310k is owed by employers or students ineligible for student finance.
- As of 31<sup>st</sup> January, no significant sums were past 90 or 120 days.
- £16k is on current payment plans.

- Debt often relates to students who withdraw, becoming liable for 50% of fees, with the SLC covering the rest.
- The team is actively working to prevent debt from reaching 120+ days and being sent to debt collection.

Governors **requested** management to consider its approach to the level of bad debt provision at year end (**ACTION 9**).

Members **noted** the good progress made on last year

### **HTQ Grant - Clawback Risk**

The Council requested a paper to understand the clawback rules for HTQ grant funding. Members noted the following information:

Grant Overview:

- UCP received £829k to set up and equip seven HTQ courses.
- Each course has a target enrolment number to be met at one of four enrolment points over the next three years.

Clawback Rules:

- Targets are not cumulative but set at 80% of the original bid's forecast enrolment.
- If the 80% target isn't met, the best enrolment point will be used to calculate clawback.
- Clawback is based on the difference between actual student numbers and 80% of the original target.

Current Performance:

- One area met its target at the first enrolment point.
- Two areas were below target, and one had no recruitment.
- Three courses will recruit for the first time in September 2025.
- £330k of funding is secured to date.

Financial Implications:

- No clawback decision by the Department for Education (DfE) until 2028.
- Too early to create a financial provision for clawback.
- A contingent liability comment could be considered in this and next year's financial statements.
- If the penultimate enrolment point (third out of four) does not meet targets, a provision could be considered in 2026/27.

External Factors:

- DfE threshold rules change annually, potentially removing clawback conditions before 2028.

Conclusion:

- While the clawback clause is strict, actioning it is too remote to consider a financial provision currently.
- Council members will receive updates after each enrolment point.

Members **thanked** the CFO for explaining the position and for the clarity of the report. The Council **concluded** that the probability of any clawback was remote enough to preclude the need for any accounting provision at this stage.

## **9. GOVERNANCE**

Decision item

Speaker: Interim Governance Director/Academic Director

The Council was requested to consider and approve the 2024/25 Audit Review of UCP Compliance with CUC Code of Good Governance and, separately, amendments to the UCP Scheme of Delegation and Audit Committee and Search & Remuneration Committee Terms of Reference. In its consideration, Members noted the following points:

**2024/25 Audit Review of UCP Compliance with CUC Code of Good Governance:**

- An audit review of UCP Council's compliance with the CUC Code of Good Governance has been conducted.
- The review reflects a positive performance against the CUC Code criteria.
- The report will be further reviewed and amended in July after committee mergers.

**Statutory Governance Documentation – Amendments to Reflect Revised Committee Arrangements:**

- IEG Board and UCP Council agreed to streamline UCP governance by removing separate UCP Audit and Governance & Nominations Committees.
- The UCP Audit Committee is to be disbanded, with its Chair and two Council Members joining the IEG Audit Committee.
- To ensure full compliance in terms of governance, the OfS were notified of the planned approach and their approval sought.
- Actions taken to ensure compliance:
  - UCP Articles of Association reviewed (no changes required).
  - UCP Scheme of Delegation amended.
  - Audit and Search & Governance Committee Terms of Reference have been amended and presented for approval.
- Membership arrangements:
  - Alison Davies and Peter Walker to join the IEG Audit Committee (Tony Keeling already sits on the Committee as its Chair).
  - Les Ebdon to join the Search & Remuneration Committee.
- Next steps:
  - IEG Board to approve amendments to its governance documents and committee terms.
  - Business Cycles for 2025/26 to be amended.
  - IEG Audit and Search & Remuneration Committee dates to be shared.

The Council **approved** the:

- 2024/25 Audit Review of UCP Compliance with the CUC Code.
- amended UCP Scheme of Delegation.

It further **recommended** the revised Audit Committee and Search & Governance Committee Terms of Reference, as presented, to the IEG Board for approval. (**ACTION 10**).

## 10. UCP KPIS AND DASHBOARD

Information item                      Speaker: Academic Director

Members received the updated KPI performance position and noted, in particular, that:

- UCP is doing well on conversion
- High retention and positive student surveys
- Moving to good NSS

- Most of the key issues have been covered in other agenda items

The KPI report was **noted**.

## 11. UCP RISK REPORT

Discussion item

Speaker: GD Finance/Academic Director

The Council was presented with the UCP Risk report and Board Assurance Framework for March 2024/25. Members noted the following information:

General Information:

- The risk report was reviewed by the UCP Audit Committee on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2025.
- No updates have occurred since that review.

Key Risk Board Assurance Framework:

- All three risks on the framework have been revised as of February 2025.
- Finance Risk:
- The residual risk score has increased due to the failure to meet January 2025 recruitment targets, impacting both 2024/25 and 2025/26 financial forecasts.
  - A full financial review is underway and will be presented to the UCP Council.

Staff Recruitment and Retention Risk:

- Recommendation to remove this risk.
- Retention and vacancy levels have normalized, and the residual risk score is lower.

Contingency Risk Register - Summary of Changes:

- Risk 264 (Student Accommodation Costs):
  - Proposal to remove this risk, which relates to recovering funds held as a provision against pre-2020 student accommodation costs.
  - Decision depends on due diligence regarding the current company operating the halls of residence and the likelihood of UCP settling the debt.
- Risk 231 (Data Systems and Reporting):
  - Risk score has reduced.
  - Recruitment is underway for HE-specific student records roles in the MIS team, as well as general staff to support planning and reporting.

Members discussed the report and **noted** and **approved** the UCP Audit Committee recommendation, that:

- the updates to the Contingency Risks are agreed;
- the Staff Recruitment and Retention Risk be removed; and
- held funds identified at risk 264 be released subject to the satisfactory due diligence checks to be undertaken by management following which the risk should be removed (**ACTION 11**)

## 12. ANY URGENT BUSINESS (REF. 1C)

Standing item

Speaker: Chair

On behalf of the Council, the Chair thanked Rachel Jolley (HE Staff Representative) for her service as she leaves UPC to take up her role as Assistant Head of Faculty at IEG in May. Members noted that Kirstie Marfleet (HE Student representative) will also be leaving UCP on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2025.

## 13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Scheduling

Speaker: Chair

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 26<sup>th</sup> June 2025.

**At this point, staff and student representatives were requested to leave the UCP Council meeting prior to the Confidential Section.**