

UCP COUNCIL

26th June 2025

4:30 PM - 6:30 PM

IEG Boardroom, Peterborough College or by Google Link

ATTENDANCE

PRESENT

Alison Davies	
David Dixon	
Sir Les Ebdon	Chair
Matthew Bradbury	(Online)
Peter Walker	
Sameena Aziz	(Online, from Item 4)
Tony Keeling	(Online)
Kirstie Marfleet	
Louise Perry	(Online)
Rachel Nicholls	(Online)

IN ATTENDANCE

Liz Knight	
Julia Bates	
Dan Lee	
Jane Spurgin	
Cory Brook	(Observer: HE Student Governor from 01.07.25)

ABSENT

Mark Woods

1. UCP COUNCIL MEETING - PART 1 - WELCOME

Welcome to Cory as the new council member representing UCP from 1st July 2025.

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

2. MINUTES

- (a) **Minutes of the last meeting (20.03.25):** The minutes were approved as an accurate record, for signature by the Chair. **(ACTION 1)**
- (b) **Matters arising from the minutes:** None
- (c) **Action Tracker:** Members noted the completed actions, that Action 4 is on the agenda, and that ongoing actions will be reviewed at the next meeting. Against Action 5 (Degree Awarding Powers) UCP will be exploring this as part of an options appraisal, including meeting with other colleges who hold Degree Awarding Powers **(ACTION 2)**

The Council received and noted the contents of the following (draft) minutes:

- (d) Minutes from the Search & Governance Committee (12.06.25) - draft
- (e) Minutes from Audit Committee (18.06.25) - draft
- (f) Minutes from Academic Board (23.05.25) – draft

3. UCP KPIS AND DASHBOARD

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

- Finance is picked up under the Finance Report (on agenda);
- Student growth – an improving position (applications 15.2% above same stage last year) and performing strongly against the wider sector. Currently 100% acceptances against offers. The key is clearing - the more contact, the better the conversion rate. A series of events is in train – open invitations to come to campus and UCP is still doing taster sessions and open events with schools and other year 12 providers;
- Quality – retention is strong and the satisfaction rates from students across a number of areas are strong, with Arts & Science doing particularly well (71% compared to 51% last year – looking for positive results in July when those are published). It was however felt that survey fatigue impacted on NSS final year students who did not wish to do both surveys. Next year there will be a semester one survey, but final year students will not be asked to do two surveys;
- Valuing our people - UCP is managing staff turnover by not refilling some positions, using this as an opportunity to address some skills gaps and align staffing with areas of student growth, particularly at its Stamford campus. Management is confident in its ability to realign resources effectively.

Members asked why management feels students choose UCP? It was explained that a key factor is understanding student needs and offering tailored support, with small class sizes, individual guidance, and an emphasis on responding to student feedback being

particularly effective. Student Governors confirmed this, highlighting that factors like pre-enrolment support, small class sizes, personal teaching, and flexible study options are what ultimately convinced them to enroll.

The Council was pleased to receive the information included in the KPI report.

4. ACADEMIC DIRECTOR'S REPORT

(Sameena Aziz joined the meeting at this point)

The Council received a report from the Academic Director outlining key developments at UCP, focusing on adapting to funding changes, managing student recruitment, evolving its curriculum, and enhancing student experience.

It considered the following key points:

- **OfS Funding Cuts & Capital Bids:** The OfS has reduced its strategic priorities grant by £108 million for 2025-26. UCP plans to bid for new OfS capital funding to enhance resources in Stamford and refurbish its HE block, aligning with NHS preventative health and Lincolnshire IoT. Members noted that failure to secure this funding could halve the annual capital allocation compared to the previous year.
- **Strategic Realignment:** UCP is delaying its 2025-2030 strategy launch to align with new OfS conditions, government priorities, and a focus on FE/HE collaboration. The revised strategy will emphasize student outcomes, experience, equality, financial sustainability, and partnerships. HE Strategy from government has also not arrived. Meetings are being held to draft a new strategy; to include Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to measure its success and ensure it aligns with and supports any future development plans for the organization.
- **Student Recruitment:** UCP has seen a 100% increase in firm acceptances this year (105 vs 49), notably in Education and Sport. However, the upcoming clearing period is anticipated to be competitive due to increased demand for undergraduate places by other providers.
- **Curriculum Adjustments:** BA History and Archaeology has been cancelled, and the OU validated offer is being refined. New programs in Education and Allied Health are being explored with Lincoln Bishop University (formerly Bishop Grosseteste University). New degree apprenticeships in User Experience, Digital Marketing, and Creative Design are approved, but the Serious and Complex Crime Investigator program has been halted due to IfATE guidance changes. Acting for Stage and Screen may be replaced and Lincoln is discussing some teaching provision with an opportunity to gain QTS.
- **Degree apprenticeships:** Three approved but one unauthorised currently – feedback from IfATE.
- **ARU Teach-Out & Student Engagement:** UCP is completing its contract termination with ARU. A new Student Officer has been appointed to boost student representation and engagement.

Members further discussed that:

- there is a notable increase in applications from mature students, who are more committed to studying locally. However, it is anticipated that this year's clearing process will be highly competitive for 17-18 year-old applicants. There has been disturbance across the sector with universities increasingly offering financial incentives to attract students;
- the agenda papers mentioned that Cory had either been elected or appointed. He was asked which it was and if it was by all the students as this might lead to better engagement. He made it clear that all representatives such as himself were elected by the Student Council and that every student was entitled to attend and vote at such meetings;
- the national higher education (HE) strategy has been a source of frustration due to its delay. However, the recent publication of the Industrial Strategy and a

minister's comments suggest there could be a new opportunity to focus on Higher Education in Further Education (HE in FE).

The Council noted the report and looked forward to reviewing and discussing the developing UCP Strategy 2025-2030 (**ACTION 3**).

5. ACCESS & PARTICIPATION PLAN 2026-2030

The Council was requested to consider and approve the Access & Participation Plan (APP) 2026-2030 presented, and noted the following:

Access and Participation Plan (APP): Key Points

An APP is a mandatory strategic document for all UK higher education providers, designed to promote equality of opportunity for underrepresented and disadvantaged students.

Purpose:

- Improve student access to higher education.
- Enhance success during studies.
- Boost progression into graduate employment or further study.

Core Components:

- Identifies barriers/risks to equal opportunity through data analysis (e.g., by age, disability, ethnicity, FSM eligibility, IMD, POLAR).
- Outlines specific interventions (activities/strategies) to address identified barriers.
- Details evaluation methods to assess intervention impact.
- Specifies planned financial investment over a four-year period.

Why it's Essential:

- Financial Sustainability: OfS approval is required in order to charge tuition fees above the basic level.
- Institutional Commitment: Serves as a formal plan for fulfilling Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) commitments.

UCP's Plan:

- The Plan has been produced by first using data exploration to identify eight key risks related to different student characteristics, focusing on those affecting the largest number of students. From these risks strategic objectives were developed and corresponding intervention strategies, each with its own cost implications and evaluation plan. The Plan was also shaped by significant input from the student council, and a four-year investment summary is included.
- **Risks (Section 1):** In-depth analysis of student data across the lifecycle identified disparities in continuation, completion, attainment, and progression, cross-referenced with OfS Equality of Opportunity Risk Register.
- **Objectives (Section 2):** Eight strategic, measurable objectives address specific inequalities.
- **Intervention Strategies (Section 3):** Targeted actions (e.g., Marketing, Financial support, Contextual Admissions, Staff Development, Mentoring, Academic Support, Employability) linked to objectives. Some strategies consolidate activities for specific groups like FSM-eligible students and students of Asian and Black heritage.
- **Performance & Consultation (Annex A & Section 6):** Assesses performance against established targets and details how student feedback informed the plan.
- **Financial Investment (Annex 2):** Details UCP's committed financial investment for plan implementation (for 2026/27).

- The final plan must be submitted to the OfS by 31st July 2025, after obtaining Student Officer endorsement and Council's approval. The OfS may then come back with queries, and a resubmission may be required.

Members queried why the Plan does not aim to eliminate ethnic disparities in student continuation and completion rates within four years. The response cited national trends, suggesting a realistic approach is needed. Additionally, Council members received assurance that the Plan was developed with input from the Student Council and other staff across the Group. Members also commented that it is important to keep an eye on what is happening in the labour market – and constantly assess what preparation we are giving students to be able to access it.

It was discussed that the CEO had recently attended a meeting to discuss how HE and FE institutions can work more closely together. A key point of discussion was the effectiveness of current APPs and a sense that they have not had the desired impact on widening access and participation – this led to a proposal that future strategies should be considered on a regional rather than an institutional basis. It was agreed that the Group will meet again to continue building collaborative partnerships between HE and FE institutions, as it was suggested that a change in strategy may be forthcoming. The Student Governor commented that a regional approach would be particularly interesting.

Members expressed their gratitude to Dan Lee for producing what it felt is a very good piece of work, extremely well written. The Student Governor also praised Dan for his excellent work in producing the document, especially for involving students throughout the process and effectively incorporating their feedback.

In conclusion, the Council supported the APP and wished UCP every success when it is submitted to the OfS. The outcome will be reported at next Council meeting (**ACTION 4**).

6. REGULATORY RETURNS AND POLICY UPDATE

The Council was advised that, following the introduction of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 and subsequent revisions in February 2025 it has been necessary to review UCP's policy statement and practice with regard to its mission of advancing truth, knowledge and understanding.

In light of this, the Council was asked to consider the UCP Policy Statement on Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech June 2025 which is the new academic freedom statement, to fulfil its legal obligations. It was noted, in particular, that:

- it is a statement not a policy – about how we ensure we uphold the values;
- quite a few statements have been updated across the sector;
- it is important to clearly define what we mean;
- we resolve to act with academic integrity;
- the statement sets out conditions around incitement to hatred;
- it will be necessary for the Statement to be reviewed and updated going forward;
- OfS is issuing a checklist for compliance.

The Council approved the Statement for publication, as required.

7. UCP FINANCE REPORT

Members received the Period 10 UCP finance report for the financial year 2024-25, the UCP 3 Year Financial Plan and the UCP Financial Regulations 2025/26. The following points were noted, in particular, and discussed:

(a) Management Accounts - Finance Report P10

- Forecast outturn – the position has improved due to received grant income and a reduction in costs, with the objective to reach a balanced position by year end.
- April notification of NI grant – better position than anticipated .
- March LGPS contributions were revised down (new calculations for long term liability) but may go up again next April. This was a fortunate surprise.
- There is now a small deficit forecast currently (31 May) and an ongoing review to reduce costs further that do not impact directly on students.
- A good piece of work has been undertaken by the Finance and UCP teams.
- More bad debts provided for have been recovered, and the team are targeting as low a bad debt position as can be achieved

Members **thanked** management and their teams for all the work that has been done to control expenditure and close the gap to hopefully realise a balanced position at year end, reflecting on this positive achievement.

(b) UCP 3 Year Financial Plan

- Much work has been done to revise the financial plan, using the UCP 5-year plan as the basis. All income lines have been reviewed to support a prudent approach - optimism bias considered to reduce forecast income down to 89%.
- Firm acceptances significantly up against last year providing a confidence that UCP will hit its planned numbers.
- Student numbers will be assessed in September.
- Bad debt management and income collection processes to be reviewed, working with teams to see where costs may be reduced for the next financial and academic year.
- The plan feels in a sound position to go forward with a £14K budgeted surplus, and a further £90K of savings to be identified.

On checking the prudence of income/expenditure forecasts Members were advised that:

- the expected fee income is appropriate as a careful assessment of the mix of students (courses/grant formulas) has been applied;
- capital grants yet to be confirmed but UCP students are typically Widening Participation students and the anticipated £38k (down from £50k in previous years) is a sensible approach for planning at this point;
- HTQ tuition fees reflect a growth in planned enrolment (risked downwards) – whilst there is still a risk, it is not felt that the planned income is overstated in the Plan;
- OU Validation fees – a fixed price element applied against a higher number of students, so no savings identified as yet;
- three new Access to HE courses are being offered at IEG which should feed UCP with future enrolments;
- careful consideration has been given to the curriculum offer, filling gaps as appropriate, mindful of the UCP supportive delivery model.

UCP Council members were asked for feedback on the Plan, which will be presented to IEG Board, embedded into the Group three year financial Plan, incorporating any amendments discussed during this review. IEG Board approves the final version of this plan as part of their reserved powers.

The Council noted the financial position as at Period 10, approved the UCP 3 Year Financial Plan, recommending it to the IEG Board (**ACTION 5**).

8. ANNUAL POLICY REVIEW - UCP FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

The Council was requested to review the UCP Financial Regulations for 2025/26, an annual responsibility. It was noted that there were not many changes this year:

- increase in level of check of assets;
- Section 12 to be removed – no subcontractors and no plans to have any;
- A number of housekeeping changes – making it easier for the Accountable Officer to manage requests

The Council reviewed the UCP Financial Regulations 2025/26 and **recommended** them to the IEG Board, commenting that it was grateful for the work undertaken (**ACTION 6**).

9. APPROVAL OF REPORTS

Members received a report on the Annual Safeguarding Report 2023/24 and the IEG Safeguarding for all Policy, the Annual Complaints and Compliments Report 2024/25, the published OIA Annual Complaints Summary 2023/24 and the Prevent Update, Risk Assessment and Action Plan. The following was noted and discussed:

(a) IEG Annual Safeguarding Report 2023/24 and IEG Safeguarding for All Policy

The report provided Members with:

- reassurance of effective safeguarding arrangements;
- a summary of safeguarding issues in 2023-24;
- clarity of future work and priorities in 2024-25 for IEG;
- an area of focus remains mental health, and this is a national sector wide issue;
- information about Spectrum Life, introduced to support all students with a range of mental health, wellbeing and support resources
- an area for focus for UCP remains the ability to more easily track and monitor engagement by HE students;
- advice that the Safeguarding for All Policy has been updated following updates to Keeping Children Safe in Education in September 2024. The policy reflects updated guidance;
- the IEG Board approved the updated Safeguarding Policy in October 2024;
- information and assurance on the substantive changes from 1st September 2024 and IEG's approach towards them;
- UCP and IEG staff are well trained and work closely together.

It was noted that UCP have not had any safeguarding issues or reports to Channel (Prevent), nor has it had any instances of sexual harassment or violence. UCP will work more closely together with IEG to align and sequence OfS reporting timeline requirements (**ACTION 7**).

(b) Annual Complaints & Compliments Report 2024/25

The report provided an overview of formal complaints and compliments received in 2024–2025, with comparisons to 2023–2024. It was noted that:

- complaints remain low, with 2 formal submissions in each year and no referrals to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA);
- complaints related to access to online learning for students with health conditions and delays in Disability Student Allowance (DSA) support;

- individual Learning Plans (ILPs) were introduced to address these concerns, with approval gained from The Open University (OU);
- the Complaints Policy was revised to improve clarity, timeliness, and accessibility and align with good practice frameworks;
- compliments focused on inclusive teaching, staff support, and neurodiversity awareness, with 23 formal entries in 2024–2025 and 11 the previous year;
- across the sector the number of complaints is increasing due to complexity in terms of disability support;
- the team is constantly reviewing its processes – always looking for improvement;
- the published OIA Published Annual Summary 2023/24 was shared for information.

HE student governor reported that some complaints are received but they are usually minor and normally put right by speaking to a staff member. Students do know that they can speak up at any time at Student Council.

The report highlights University Centre Peterborough's commitment to continuous improvement and enhancement as we seek to learn and adapt based on findings from both complaint and compliment handling.

(c) Prevent Update, Risk Assessment and Action Plan

The Council was advised that, following the introduction of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 and subsequent revisions in February 2025 it has been necessary to review UCP's Prevent Risk Assessment. Although this encompasses much of the good practice within IEG there are differences, primarily . HE students are given additional levels of access to research and information. They also undertake training on ethics prior to commencing their research (the risk assessment will be reviewed by the IEG Safeguarding and Prevent Group on 19th June).

Actions undertaken this year were noted:

- completed and submitted the UCP annual declaration in December 2024. This was approved by the Chair and was approved by the OfS in March;
- on 3rd June UCP was advised that there will be further changes to the categories in the annual declaration and these will likely be in place for the 2026 return. UCP is therefore updating its monitoring processes and External Speaker Policy. The latter is part of a wider policy review being undertaken across the summer;
- additional checklists are likely to be required in order to demonstrate that UCP is complying with freedom of speech. These are currently in development.

Discussion clarified that research access for students is available both on campus and at home, while UCP's main focus is on ensuring ethical standards and the credibility of research, with all students receiving foundational guidance but a more concentrated training effort being placed on second-year students.

The Council was pleased to approve the Prevent Update, Risk Assessment and Action Plan for publication on the UCP website (**ACTION 8**).

10. UCP RISK REPORT

The Council was presented with the UCP Risk report and Board Assurance Framework for June 2025. It was noted that risk report was reviewed by the Audit Committee on 12th June 2025 and that no updates have occurred since that review. Members noted the following details:

(a) UCP Board Assurance Framework (BAF)

- the BAF contains detail on what are seen as the three strategic risks for UCP. These are enrolment, finance and staffing;
- no scores have been changed for this iteration, though considerable work on financial planning has been done, with the first version of the 2025-28 financial plan presented to Finance and Resources on 12th June. At the time of writing the overall financial risk in the Group has risen, due to uncertainty around funding. However, this is now diminishing;
- UCAS enrolment reports are looking significantly stronger than at the same time last year, but it remains too early to reduce the risk score;
- staffing recruitment and retention remains an issue, with a number of resignations being received over the last week.

(b) UCP Contingency Risks

- while there have been a number of amended or new controls and mitigations added to the register no residual risk scores have changed. Key points noted were:
 - while enrolment risk has not reduced, applications and firm acceptances are improved against the prior year. This scoring will be reviewed at enrolment;
 - Risk 263 refers to the new joint audit committee structure, as part of the governance controls;
 - Risk 264 refers to the provision held against property liabilities, a review has been undertaken, and a decision made to retain this risk for a further year;
 - Risks 268 and 269, both referring to the implementation of new study programmes have been updated with the latest position.

Removed Risks

- HE sub-contracting, as there is no sub-contract in place this year and none planned for 2025/26.

Members **noted** and **welcomed** the UCP risk report and congratulated the team on paying close attention to and reporting on risk levels throughout the year.

11. GOVERNANCE

Members were invited to consider and approve the following:

UCP Council and Academic Board Meetings Calendar 2025/26

The dates and the schedules of business for Council meetings and for the HE Academic Board had been reviewed and presented to the Council for approval. The dates are broadly similar to 2024/25 with a planned Strategic event to be held before the Council meeting in December.

Council Membership and Terms of Office

Members are invited to note the current position regarding Council membership:

- Rachel Jolley (staff member) has stepped down from the Council as she now teaches only FE students and a staff election process to choose a replacement has commenced
- Joanne Ulyatt has left the organisation and Jane Spurgin has been appointed as Governance Director

- Cory Brook has been elected as HE Student Governor and commences his term of office from 1st July, replacing Kirstie Marfleet who is leaving UCP having completed her studies
- All changes in Council membership will be reported to Companies House and to the OfS (as required) over the summer break and records updated

UCP Council members on the IEG Audit Committee 2025/26

Under the Audit Committee Terms of Reference (Item 7b(ii) – membership), the Council is required to nominate and confirm 3 UCP Council members for the year ahead at the June meeting of the UCP Council.

It is therefore proposed that Dr Alison Davies and Peter Walker are nominated and confirmed to sit on the Audit Committee 2025/26 and noted that Tony Keeling, as Chair of the Audit Committee and also a Council member, will be the third person.

Search & Governance (S&G) Committee and Remuneration Committee

Members recalled their decision in March to agree that the UCP Governance & Nominations Committee be merged with the IEG Search, Governance & Remuneration (SGR) Committee with the UCP Council Chair becoming the Vice Chair of that Committee.

To reflect most recent governance good practice advice, it has been decided to separate out the Remuneration Committee from the Search & Governance Committee. The IEG Vice Chair, Angie Morris, will chair the Remuneration Committee. UCP Council Chair, Sir Les Ebdon, remains Vice Chair of the Search & Governance Committee.

The new Terms of Reference for the Search & Governance Committee were considered.

UCP Council and HE Academic Board Terms of reference

Following recent changes, the terms of reference for the above were reviewed and the recommended changes highlighted below:

UCP Council

- 3.4 Clarified the number of terms of office for members (3 terms of 3 years maximum)
- 4.2 Reference to the Joint Audit Committee
- 5.1 Reduce the minimum number of meetings to three per academic year to reflect existing practice (Dec/Mar/Jun)
- 5.4 Included reference to Joint Search & Governance Committee
- 11.1 Removed reference to Audit and Governance & Nominations Committees
- 11.2 New clause to reference the Audit Committee and Search & Governance Committee arrangements
- Amended PRC to IEG throughout

HE Academic Board

- Reformatted but otherwise no amendments

It was noted that both terms of reference are required to be reviewed annually and will next be reviewed in June 2026.

The UCP Council:

- **approved** the UCP Council and Academic Board Meetings Calendar 2025/26;
- **approved** the appointment of Dr Alison Davies and Peter Walker to serve on the Audit Committee for 2025/26;
- **noted** the changes to the Search & Governance Committee Terms of Reference;
- **approved** the updated UCP Council Terms of Reference (subject to the above amendments);
- **approved** the updated HE Academic Board Terms of Reference **(ACTION 9)**.

12. ANY URGENT BUSINESS (REF. 1C)

None received

On behalf of the Council, the Chair thanked Kirstie Marfleet for her contributions to the UCP Council. Kirstie advised that she is excited about her Masters and looking forward to seeing members again at her graduation.

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