UCP COUNCIL MEETING

3rd December 2025

4:30 PM - 6:30 PM

Peterborough College, Boardroom

ATTENDANCE

PRESENT

Sameena Aziz	
Matthew Bradbury	
Cory Brook	
Alison Davies	
David Dixon	
Les Ebdon	
Anamika Ghosh	
Tony Keeling	
Liz Knight	
Raghav Kovurri	
Rachel Nicholls	
Louise Perry	(Online)
Peter Walker	
Mark Woods	(left at Item 4)

IN ATTENDANCE

Daniel Lee
Jane Spurgin

ABSENT

Jaki Bradley

1. WELCOME, APOLOGIES AND GOVERNANCE BUSINESS

(a) **Welcome and Apologies for absence:**
The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and noted apologies as received from Jaki Bradley

(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:**
Two requests were received and considered, as follows

(i) Approval of the online FT programme at an annual fee of £7,500, as opposed to the standard £9,000. A late validation, the fee aligns with market, study mode and addresses intake requirements (some students may be self-funding). The Council **recommended** the £7,500 fee be applied **(ACTION 1).**

(ii) The Chair provided an update following the annual review meetings held with Council members over the summer during which, he advised, the following themes were raised:

- face to face meetings were valued, although the offer of hybrid meetings could be helpful;
- concerns about succession planning for the Council, although two new members have been recently recruited;
- more information appreciated on Degree Awarding Powers;
- whether there should be some UCP student awards as part of IEG FE student awards event. This point will be taken back to the Student Council for their views **(ACTION 2);**
- seeking more interaction with students;
- the necessity of remaining strategic and not straying into operational matters.

Members **approved** that the points raised will be explored as part of the UCP Governance Development Plan 2025/26 to be presented to the next meeting of the Council for approval **(ACTION 3)**.

(d) **Ratify appointment of new UCP Council Members (previously approved by written resolution):**
The Council was delighted to **ratify** their decision to appoint Jaki Bradley and Anamika Ghosh to the UCP Council with effect from 3rd December 2025.

(e) **Appointment of UCP Council Chair & Vice-Chair 2025/26:**
Members discussed and **approved** the re-appointment of Les Ebdon as UCP Council Chair and Alison Davies as UCP Council Vice-Chair for 2025/26.

2. MINUTES

(a) **Minutes of the last meeting (26.06.25) - Parts 1 and 2:**
The Minutes and Confidential Minutes were approved for signature, subject to the correction of the spelling of Cory Brook's name **(ACTION 4)**

(b) **Matters arising from the minutes:**
None

(c) **Action Tracker:**
Members noted the actions that have been closed and received an update on the following:

- MIS: The Council noted the ongoing work to optimize MIS performance following enrolment. To ensure long-term resilience, the department is currently focused on filling vacancies and delivering specialist HE data training for existing staff. A report on the progress of these organisational developments will be shared at the next meeting. **(ACTION 5)**
- APP update: the APP was submitted and, having supplied some additional information requested, a response is awaited.

(d) **Minutes and Confidential Minutes from Audit Committee (24.09.25):**
The Minutes of the Audit Committee were received and **approved** by the Council.

(e) **Draft Minutes and Draft Confidential Minutes from Audit Committee (26.11.25):**
The draft Minutes of the Audit Committee were received and **approved** by the Council which noted the quoracy issue and **approved** the approach to ratify the decisions taken.

(f) **Draft Minutes from Academic Board (10.10.25):**
The draft Minutes of the Academic Board were received and **approved** by the Council, noting that the Academic Board will meet again tomorrow. Mark Woods will be attending the Academic Board as an observer on 27th February, and it was suggested that all dates are circulated to members who are welcome to attend **(ACTION 6).**

3. ACADEMIC DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Members received the regular report from the Academic Director **noting** and **discussing** the following key points:

- UCP has aligned its 2025–2030 strategy with the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper and the new OfS Strategy, focusing on FE/HE collaboration and financial sustainability;
- UCP currently holds TEF Silver and aims for Gold; student outcomes in continuation, completion, and progression remain above national benchmarks;
- 24/25 Student Experience (NSS) results declined in some areas, including learning resources and mental health services. Semester 1 survey data will be used to address specific concerns before the next NSS launch in February. A Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) has been implemented to address these scores through learning walks and improved academic support;
- Current enrolments stand at 440 against a financial target of 509. While Foundation degrees and part-time targets were met, full-time first degrees and Level 4/5 recruitment fell below financial targets (although recruitment has increased on 24/25) due to competitive market pressures and student financial concerns. Members **congratulated** the teams on the recruitment position in a difficult year;
- The recurrent grant increased to £334,635 following a successful appeal, though the capital bid was unsuccessful, resulting in a reduced allocation of £30k for Stamford facilities. 17 GFE's received substantial awards. Members asked what the approach will be to capital spend in light of the reduced allocation and were advised that UCP will be investing in equipment rather than build projects and will be looking for grant opportunities for funding capital build;
- The UCP application to deliver Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) modular learning was approved for January 2027. Members **congratulated** teams for the validation for a September 2026 start of three degree apprenticeships (Digital Marketeer, Creative Design Professional and Digital User Experience (UX));
- The Turnitin AI checker has been removed due to ineffectiveness and bias. UCP is trialling a "two-lane approach" to assessment, allowing permitted AI use in specific modules supported by staff training;
- The annual Prevent return was submitted with no issues; notable growth was seen in guest speaker events and student engagement activities;
- To support student mental wellbeing, Spectrum was introduced in February last year. This is rolling out and students are engaging, supporting the high levels of staff support being provided.

Members **thanked** the Academic Director for her useful report.

Members were also presented with, and **approved**, the new Governor Link arrangements for 2025/26 **(ACTION 7).**

4. UCP COUNCIL STUDENT OFFICER REPORT

The HE Student Representative, Cory Brook, presented his report providing an update on student leadership, engagement challenges, and the evolution of the student experience strategy. Members considered the following points:

Leadership & Representation

- Helen Jones has been elected as the new Deputy HE Student Representative. While her onboarding was delayed, activity is now expected to ramp up;
- Course Rep engagement has significantly improved with 100% of Peterborough cohorts now have a representation plan in place, and with Stamford reaching 2/3 coverage following a later rollout;
- Acknowledging that students are time-poor (often working/studying over 50 hours a week), more flexible ways have been introduced to enable reps to engage;

The Student Experience & Environment

- Despite technical challenges with MIS and IT systems, the induction period was rated positively due to significant staff intervention. However, some student attrition did occur during the first week. Staff were commended for their "rallying" efforts to mitigate the impact of campus issues, including a flood and lift failures;
- It has been identified that there is a specific need to further develop and support the "HE culture" at the Stamford campus;

Future Strategy & Evolution

- Large, one-off student events are being replaced by "broader events" spread over several days (e.g., 5-day windows) to accommodate students who work or have external commitments;
- A new student engagement strategy is being drafted, alongside a campaign to ensure students are aware of and can access the new maintenance grants;
- Members were pleased to hear about the "You Said, We Did" approach, providing clarity of actions for students.

Members **commended** the HE Student Representative for his full report, **noted** that the new Student Engagement Strategy is to be presented and discussed at the next Student Council meeting and **asked** that thanks be passed to staff for their resilience during the IT and infrastructure challenges at the start of the term **(ACTION 8)**.

5. UCP DASHBOARD AND KPIS

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

Finance

- The forecast deficit position has been impacted by lower-than-expected September enrolments;
- Student fee income is below budget, though partially offset by higher OfS grants and IEG resource recharges;
- Pay costs are over budget (offset by recharges), while non-pay costs remain higher than budgeted;
- The previously required cost saving has been removed to provide a more realistic forecast following a financial review;
- Management Charges have been revised downward to reflect actual student volumes, updated Teachers' Pension Grant credits, and IEG's use of UCP resources;
- Cash balances are forecast to remain healthy throughout the financial year.

Growth/Recruitment

- Year-on-year recruitment has increased, though overall numbers are impacted by a smaller Year 3 cohort legacy;

- While lower-tariff providers are seeing a national decline, UCP is currently bucking the trend with improved recruitment;
- An unusual rise in early deferrals has been noted, reflecting a wider sector trend;
- UCP has re-introduced degree pathways (e.g., BSc Applied Computer Science) in place of HTQs to better meet demand and degree structures have been adapted to support Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) delivery;
- The marketing focus remains on conversion and student messaging, and a January campaign is targeting Engineering, Business, and Counselling;
- Feedback from recent Open Days highlights two primary parental anxieties: employability (the "right degree for a job") and cost of living/tuition.

Quality

- Data for student continuation, completion, and progression remains consistently above benchmarks, with some areas exceeding targets by 20%;
- Current high performance across all metrics provides strong evidence to support an application for TEF Gold status;
- Withdrawal figures are currently being monitored for financial impact but will not be formalized for external returns until 1st December;
- Future dashboards will introduce percentage-based targets for module evaluations **(ACTION 9).**
- Survey formats have been updated, including a bespoke version for Teacher Training to align with specific Ofsted criteria.

People

- Turnover has been relatively stagnant over the past few months, however sickness absence has declined and remained well below the target;

Members discussed growth and noted that it remains variable across the portfolio, with strong performance noted in Performing Arts, Sports, and Teaching provision. The shift away from online delivery back to campus-based learning was highlighted, evidenced by the successful scheduling of five "Access to HE" groups. The upcoming Curriculum Visioning Days will be utilized to refine and share the future academic offer.

The Council emphasized the need to "gear" the UCP experience toward adults, specifically focusing on part-time pathways. It was noted that, to improve conversion, MIS is developing a streamlined, internal online application system. The objective is to "ease the route" for applicants and reduce administrative friction during the enrolment process.

Members **noted** the report

6. UCP DRAFT FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2024-25

The Council was invited to review the UCP Draft Financial Statements for recommendation to the IEG Board. It was noted that UCP's independent performance is consolidated into the IEG Group Financial Statements, following a review by the joint Audit Committee on 26th November 2025 and for final approval by the IEG Board on 11th December 2025. Members noted that:

2024/25 Financial Performance (P14 Results)

- UCP achieved a year-end surplus of c. £56k. This surpassed the budget by £45k, driven by corrections in course validation fees and a credit to the bad debt provision;
- Total income exceeded the budget by £146k. While tuition fees were £595k below budget, this was successfully mitigated by a degree apprenticeship grant and increased miscellaneous income;
- Operating costs ended £114k over-budget. This was attributed to the Degree Apprenticeship project and its associated HE validation fees;
- Savings were realized in staff, marketing, and premises costs, all of which remained below budget;

Balance Sheet and Liquidity

- The year-end position showed net assets of £366k and a healthy cash balance of £757k;
- An intercompany liability of £119k was noted;

Going Concern Assessment

- The Council reviewed the forecast for 2025/26 and the revised 2026/27 position to satisfy external audit requirements;
- The Going Concern document is of particular importance to Members this year as it currently forecasts a deficit;
- Members were assured that the organization, despite the forecasted deficit, remains a "Going Concern" for at least twelve months from the date of account approval (a legal requirement), with the re-forecast aligning fully with the 5-year strategic plan.

Members discussed that the year-end outturn was consistent with the Period 12 management accounts, representing a solid financial performance for the year. A specific query was raised regarding the cost of the bad debt provision, and it was clarified that there was a credit release of £6.5k for the year, which improved the final surplus rather than adding an expense.

The Council congratulated staff on their hard work – this had been such a difficult year and very few institutions will have turned out a surplus.

Draft UCP Accounts

Members noted that these had been reviewed by the Audit Committee last week but had been slightly amended to include the auditor's report and amended wording around the merger of the IEG and UCP Audit Committees. Members commented that the word 'university' should be amended to UCP for completeness **(ACTION 10)**.

Audit Committee Annual Report (ACAR)

Members were advised that the structure of the ACAR reflects transition between the two committees, reflects Audit Committee activity and the unqualified statements received.

The Council was content with the documents as presented and, subject to the requested amendment to the UCP Accounts, **recommended** them to the IEG Board.

It was also **agreed** that the UCP Accounts will be shared with the Council when issued to the IEG Finance & Resources Committee in future **(ACTION 11).**

7. UCP FINANCE REPORT - PERIOD 3 - 2025/26

Members received the Period 3 UCP finance report for the financial year 2025/26 - the following points were noted, in particular, and discussed that:

- The report is aligned with the forthcoming five-year plan submission to the Office for Students (OfS);
- The operating deficit stands at (£105k) and the forecast year end position is currently a deficit of (£250k). The variance is attributed to lower September enrolments, specifically delays in Degree Apprenticeships and a lower-than-expected intake for the Counselling DipHE;
- Forecasted income has been reduced due to the shortfall in student fees, adjusted for increased grant funding and recharges;
- The significant reduction in fee income is a direct result of lower-than-expected September enrolments. The current forecast remains conservative regarding January enrolments. Any successful recruitment in this period will represent a positive variance against the reported figures;
- Pay costs are above budget, but this is neutralised by corresponding recharges shown in income;
- A previously planned cost saving has been reversed to reflect the actual forecast position;
- A comprehensive cost review undertaken resulted in a downward adjustment of intercompany management recharges to align with actual student volumes and the Teachers' Pension Grant (TPG) pass-through from IEG. A further review is

underway regarding the fairness of staff recharges to IEG, specifically where UCP staff are utilized for Further Education teaching;
- Potential changes to year-end grant positions are being monitored. The NI grant is set to end in March 2026 and, whilst no government announcement has been made regarding its future, any potential extension or replacement funding will be apportioned to UCP;
- As covered under item 4, UCP was unsuccessful in its specific capital grant application but has been awarded a formula capital grant of £30k. This grant must be fully spent by March 2026;
- Despite the forecasted deficit, UCP is projected to maintain a net asset position.

Members discussed the future and the need for strategic work to be undertaken to stabilize the position for the next financial year. A key focus will be improving internal progression from Level 3 and management will analyse recruitment data and deferrals to identify barriers and opportunities for the next recruitment cycle.

The Council **noted** the current financial position and forecast for 2025/26 financial year.

8. UCP 5 YEAR PLAN

The Council was requested to review and comment on the draft 5-year plan for UCP ahead of its submission to the Office for Students (OfS) in January 2026. The plan outlines the institution's financial trajectory, student recruitment trends, and strategic academic shifts. Members noted the following key points:

Key Financial & Operational Highlights
- The draft was reviewed by the IEG Finance and Resources Committee on 12th November 2025. Following feedback from the UCP Council, it is due to be presented to the IEG Group Board for final approval on 11th December 2025;
- Despite growth in student numbers for the 2025/26 academic year, the figures fell short of financial targets. As reported above, this has resulted in a forecast deficit for the current year;
- The opening net asset position is expected to reduce by year-end. However, UCP remains a going concern;
- The plan projects a return to small annual surpluses in subsequent years as the increased 2025/26 cohort progresses into Level 5 and Level 6 study;
- An inflationary fee increase has been applied this year, but a fee increase of 16% fee is planned for 2026/27 which reflects the new fee level of £9k for a First Degree plus inflationary year and year increases. It was advised that the inflationary increase this year had been well received by students;
- The plan will form the basis for the 2026/27 budget when formed in the spring;

Academic Portfolio Changes
- The report identified specific subject areas driving the financial outlook and strong recruitment was noted in Counselling, Sport, Teacher Training, and Performing Arts;
- History, Bioscience, and Archaeology have entered a "teach out" phase. These departments are expected to yield cost savings starting in year three of the plan.

The Council **requested** that management consider asking internal audit to test the Plan and its underlying data to ensure long-term viability **(ACTION 12).**

Having considered the details, Members **recommended** the Plan and its underlying assumptions to the IEG Board for formal approval **(ACTION 13)**.

9. RISK REPORT

The Council received a report summarising the November 2025 review of UCP's risk environment, covering the Board Assurance Framework (BAF) and the Operational Risk Register. Members noted that:

Board Assurance Framework (BAF)

- The BAF continues to monitor three primary strategic risks: Enrolment, Finance, and Staffing;
- Risk scores remain elevated but stable compared to the previous year;
- Action plans have been refreshed to prioritize long-term financial sustainability;

Operational Risk Register Updates

The Council noted several key changes to the operational risk profile:

- Risk 254 (Student Experience) increased to a score of 12 following a decline in specific NSS performance metrics;
- New Risk (270) - Effective implementation of AI assessment protocols.
- Removed Risks: Sub-contract management (261) and Student Accommodation (264) were removed as they are no longer applicable to current operations.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Strategy

Following recommendations from a dedicated Risk Management Committee workshop on 6th November 2025, the Council discussed the integration of AI-related risks into future registers. Key areas of focus include:

- Managing student plagiarism, copyright issues in resource generation, and student complaints regarding AI accusations;
- Protecting against data loss from staff inputting sensitive information into AI tools;
- Monitoring staff marking techniques and ensuring access to appropriate platforms;
- Trialling AI within some assignments: in one-part students will use AI and in the second part they will critique it - working on ethical and sustainable dimensions, copyright, protection. (TurnIt In has been cancelled as it disadvantages non-English first language students).

Members discussed the inclusion of new risks on the risk register:

- Use of AI by students in their work;
- Impact of something going wrong at or with a validating partner;
- Loss of key personnel (under staffing risk)

Management to consider the above for inclusion on the risk register **(ACTION 14).**

The Council **noted** the information provided in the risk reports.

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING: 18 MARCH 2026

Members noted the date of the next Council meeting.

Meeting closed at 18:30