

MINUTES

STRATEGY AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE, SP-24

Date: Wednesday 4 June 2025

Time: 1500

Location: CA 306 Catalyst, Leek Road

Members		
Precious Ogbein	Student Governor (President, Students' Union)	P
Professor Chris Headleand	Staff Governor (Academic staff)	P
Professor Martin Jones	Vice Chancellor	P
Juliet Oosthuysen (Chair)	External Member	P
Martin Pugh (Deputy Chair)	External Member	P
Josie Morris	External Member	P
In attendance		
Ian Blachford	Chief Operating Officer and Clerk to the Board of Governors	IA
Sally McGill	Chief Financial Officer & Deputy Chief Executive	IA
Raheel Nawaz	Pro Vice Chancellor – Education & Research	IA
Sue Boyce (minutes)	Assistant Clerk to the Board of Governors	IA

P = Present; A = Apologies; Ab = Absent; L = Late; IA = In Attendance

1 MEETING MANAGEMENT	
481	There were apologies for absence received.
482	There were no new declarations of interest received.
483	Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee, 5 March 2025 23 SP/24/01 The minutes were approved subject to an amendment in the summary of the Strategic context report which was updated by Martin Jones. The minutes were approved.
484	Matters arising: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minute 471 – There have been no further major league tables reported since the last paper and thus this has been omitted from the agenda. • Minute 472 - . It has now been confirmed by the ESFA auditor that the total error for the University was just over £18,000, or 2.38% of the sample. This had been shared with the Board by email on 28th March 2025.
485	*Overview of annual business 2024-25* SP/24/02 was noted.
2 FOR DISCUSSION AND/OR APPROVAL (marked below accordingly)	
486	The Strategic Context for HE Landscape SP/24/03 was introduced by the Vice Chancellor, highlighting the following points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE), a single funding system for post-18 student finance in England, will be introduced from September 2026. It aims to deliver transformational change by broadening access to high-quality, flexible education and training, and supporting greater mobility between institutions. • The LLE loan will cover tuition fees and maintenance loans, with extra financial help for learners with disabilities and childcare needs, and additional entitlement available for priority subjects. From its launch, it will be available for full courses at level 4 – 6, and modules of high-value technical courses at level 4 - 5. • The LLE will be available to new and returning learners, up to the age of 60. The University is establishing an LLE Working Group to ensure that the University's current offer is not impacted by these changes; we are primed to take

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490

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2.6	<p>The Quarterly Energy Consumption Performance Report SP/24/08 was introduced for discussion by Sally McGill, Chief Operating Officer and Deputy Chief Executive.</p> <p>The University's scope 1 and 2 emissions target for 2024-25 of 3,559 tCO₂e will not be achieved because the level of decarbonisation of grid electricity in the UK has reversed since 2022, when the carbon emissions targets were set, meaning that the conversion factor used to calculate the actual carbon emissions from electricity consumed in 2024-25 is higher than the one used to calculate the annual target. The actual scope 1 and 2 emissions for 2024-25 are likely to be around 3,800 tCO₂e.</p> <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Committee was informed that although the carbon emission target will not be met, it is projected to be achieved upon completion of the Student Village project. <p>There were no further comments and the report was noted.</p>
491	<p>The Staffing Demographic Profile Report SP/24/09 was introduced for discussion by Ian Blachford, Chief Operating Officer. The report highlights that the University is making good progress towards the increasing presence of ethnic minority staff within the workforce, to bring this in line with the regional data:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In May 2025 the University employed 1,240 staff (excluding part-time lecturers). 84.4% declared they were from a White background, 12.8% declared they were from an Ethnic Minority background. Our current target is to ensure 17% of staff employed across the organisation are from an ethnic minority background. In terms of direction of travel, in January 2022 (the commencement in role of the current Vice Chancellor and the development of the overall KPI), 8.4% of our staff were from an ethnic minority background. Since that time, we have seen a positive increase of 4.4% more ethnic minority staff employed in the period, bringing us to our current position of 12.8%. The in year milestone for 2024-2025 was 13% which has been broadly achieved. Modelling our current recruitment, selection, and staff turnover rates, we are aiming to reach our internal target of 17% ethnic minority staff by 2026-27, however this is dependent particularly on the replacement of roles that become vacant. Is important to understand whether we are employing more people from ethnic minority backgrounds who live within the region, or employing more people from outside the UK, who would require visas. From January 2022 to May 2025, a further 42 people were employed from a minority ethnic background, making the total of 159 (12.8%). The data illustrates 54.4% ethnic minority employees are from the UK/Ireland and 2.7 % are from the EU/EEA (European Union/European Economic Area) and 42.7% are from other countries. The overall ethnic minority figures are pleasing; however, we are aware these mask issues of under representation on a school and service basis. To address this, along with the impact the Target Operating Model may have on the ethnic minority profile per school and service area (positive, neutral or negative), we are proactively monitoring the staff ethnic data as a part of our equality commitments. The HROD function is working closely with underrepresented areas of the University, to ensure that as vacancies arise, we continue to focus upon an inclusive approach to recruitment. The ethnicity data is monitored at the University of Staffordshire Inclusion Group meetings and with the Deans and Directors at their Senior Leadership Team meetings. Should any disparities be identified, these will be addressed via the on-going delivery of the inclusive recruitment and selection, and the consciously inclusive thinking and behaviours programme. <p>There were no comments and the report was noted.</p>
492	<p>The Student Demographic Profile Report SP/24/10 was introduced for discussion by Ian Blachford, Chief Operating Officer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The University has a KPI for student demography - student demographic profile that mirrors the post 92 Sector norms, which was to have a particular focus upon ethnicity, at full time undergraduate level, as this was an area of further development, which had previously been identified. The baseline position in 2021-2022 when the KPI was established was that we comprised a BAME student profile 18.2% of students. The following trajectory was established as part of the KPI setting: 2022-2023: 19.5%, 2023-2024: 22%, 2024-2025: 23.5%, 2025-2026: 25% and 2026-2027: 27% Following the in-year milestones being set, more up to date external data was procured which allowed us to focus upon the post 92 part of the sector and at a subject group level. This would allow a more informed KPI, annual milestones and a focus on subject groupings to inform more specific interventions. Consequently, the KPI annual milestones have been upwardly amended to reflect this new data set, as follows: 2022-2023: 19.5%, 2023-2024: 22%, 2024-2025: 28.9%, 2025-2026: 29.5% and 2026-2027: 30.8% For the current year we are required to meet or exceed the annual milestone of 28.9%. The University's performance is currently at 31.2%. From this analysis eight subject groupings have failed to achieve the percentage in year benchmark for their subject area. Whilst psychology is narrowly behind this figure, the remaining seven areas need to undertake remedial actions

	<p>to ensure that access to these subject areas is as diverse and inclusive as it can be, in order to both hit this KPI, but more importantly to aid our recruitment efforts</p> <p>There were no comments and the report was noted.</p>
493	<p>The Apprenticeships Performance Report SP/24/11 was introduced for discussion by Raheel Nawaz, Pro Vice Chancellor Education and Research.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Externally (OfS) and internally funded portfolio development has resulted in 18 new and refreshed standards in 2024-25, enabling the University's strategic shift from an overreliance on Policing to a diverse portfolio offer. The sector faces significant challenges, especially the review of Level 7 funding. To mitigate this, we are advancing innovative, employer-funded alternatives and early starts for cohorts likely to be affected by policy shifts. In 2023/24, the University recruited 555 new apprentices. At the last Committee meeting, we projected 682 new starts for the current year. Owing to the carefully planned interventions, the projected figure for 2024/25 starts has been boosted to 754. If fully materialised, this will be a 36% growth from the previous year. Year-to-date income for 2024/25 (August to March) stands at £9.8m, with the full year income forecasted at £15.3m. While the withdrawal of West Midlands Police from the PCDA programme will impact future income, growth from new and existing standards, including a £3.8m contract <ul style="list-style-type: none"> extension for Level 6 and a new Level 7 contract of circa £1.1m with the MoD will provide a foundation for recovery and growth. Apprenticeship Accountability Framework (AAF): The University's apprenticeship provision continues to exceed/meet the Apprenticeship Accountability Framework (AAF) thresholds, with an Ofsted 'Good' rating and a Qualification Achievement Rate (QAR) of 77.8% against the AAF requires-improvement threshold of 60%. The ESFA Audit concluded in April 2025. The total value of clawback was £18,382 (compared to the maximum possible of £17,144,589). The DfE auditor described the outcome as "fantastic" by national standards and extensively praised the University's professionalism and preparedness. <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Members commended the portfolio diversification and agility of deliver models that have resulted in significant growth from a declining position. It was also agreed that the ongoing efforts to maximise recruitment on L7 programmes should continue. <p>There were no further comments and the report was noted.</p>
494	<p>The In-year Student Retention Report SP/24/12 was introduced for discussion by Ian Blachford, Chief Operating Officer who noted the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retention is our ability to keep students on their chosen programme of study, ensuring that they are engaging well, are successful, and are fully supported. Withdrawal rates are the key metric used to measure retention. The withdrawal rates at the University had been increasing since 2021; however, the University's new approaches to earlier interventions have started to make a positive impact resulting in a 2.1% improvement from the year-to-date (YTD) position last year. This paper also outlines the key challenges and mitigations related to retention. <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Members commended the intuitive report and noted that the University is making gains despite the atypical nature of student profile. Martin Pugh commended the effective application of data and leading indicators to drive positive outcomes. Raheel Nawaz highlighted that within the University's cohort, some students declare disabilities and many experience low confidence. Nevertheless, 80% achieve positive graduate outcomes which reflects the University's targeted support. Martin Pugh noted that for new applicants, it is also crucial to demonstrate that University of Staffordshire provides excellent academic and pastoral support. Chris Headleand highlighted that many students face multiple challenges and thrive at the University despite having struggled in traditional HE environments. Applicants appreciate visible support structures such as mental health services. Juliet Oosthuysen highlighted the need to clearly communicate the support structures in place for students which help build trust in the student journey. She proposed a communication matrix to tailor credible, evidence based messages across channels, aligned with the specific needs of distinct target audiences. Discussion ensued on the University's unique value proposition and it was noted that the Marketing Student Recruitment and Admissions Recovery Plan will focus on how the University differentiates itself. Martin Pugh added that the institution's value proposition should be underpinned by specific, credible evidence – some general to the student experience and others course specific. <p>There were no further comments and the report was noted.</p>

495	<p>The Student Employability Report SP/24/13 was introduced for discussion for Ian Blachford, Chief Operating Officer. We are doing well but we have identified a risk and we know what's 3 years ahead and want to be ready for that. The regular report highlights key employability activities and their impact on student experience and KPIs, with the following key points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employability is being explicitly embedded into the Course Monitoring process • A Turing bid of circa £300k was submitted to DfE to support international mobility, results will be announced in July. • Be-Inspired, the university's funded start-up programme, continues to be successful with 18% student-led businesses identified as high-growth ventures. • The University's graduate exhibition event GradEX has been expanded with more participating students as well as employers. • Full time employability support has been launched at SUL. • The University has been shortlisted for two prestigious employability awards further strengthening reputation and visibility as a university of choice for prospective students and employers • It is suggested that moving forward the Guardian methodology is used as the main metric for measuring KPI performance and interim targets. <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was noted that the report provides assurance that graduate outcomes and graduate retention remain key priorities for the University. <p>There were no further comments and the report was noted.</p>
496	<p>The Research Performance Report SP/24/14 was introduced for discussion for Professor Raheel Nawaz, Pro Vice Chancellor Education and Research who highlighted the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research income remains on track and is currently forecast to exceed the revised target of £1.1M in the current financial year. • The University continues to be successful in securing research grant funding and 26 new awards have been confirmed for 2024-25 with a total value of £1.7M. • Early career researchers have been successful in competitive and prestigious funding schemes, and senior academic staff have continued to apply for larger awards with several notable successes. • Overall, 52% of publications in the current REF cycle have been co-authored internationally. • A key publication metric (the field-weighted citation index) indicates that University of Staffordshire research is cited 34% more often than the global average for similar research, highlighting its reach and impact. • The quality of the journals in which University of Staffordshire researchers have published has continued to increase with 55% of publications since January 2021 in top-tier (Q1) journals in their field and 64.2% of those published in 2025. • Key information about the REF submission process has started to be released by the national REF team and we have commenced a readiness review to ensure that we maximise the university's REF 2029 submission. <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Martin Jones informed the Committee of the University's strategy to maintain momentum in research development, noting that as well as chairing two research Committees, efforts are continuing to build a smaller, focussed research community with an emphasis on securing larger grants. • Members commended the results and noted that quality indicators have improved significantly, indicating positive progress. • Martin Pugh asked about the REF dependent funding allocation. Martin Jones responded that the QR budget, managed by the Department for Education, has been protected over the last 5 years and is linked to inflation. • Chris Headleand noted that effective leadership, increased empowerment, and rationalisation of research centres have positively enthused the research community. <p>There were no further comments and the report was noted.</p>
497	<p>The Module Evaluation Report – Semester Two SP/24/15 was introduced for discussion by Professor Raheel Nawaz, Pro Vice Education and Research who highlighted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The overall UG positivity rate for End Module Feedback (EMF) Apr 25 was 89.5% (+3.5pp compared to last year) with a response rate of 23%. The NSS lead indicator, the Level 6 (L6) overall positivity rate, was 86.2% (+4.2pp compared to last year). • This academic year, we made changes to enhance how we improve student satisfaction with learning and teaching throughout the student journey. We have embedded the EMF as part of our risk-based approach to course monitoring. In January 2025 we targeted 23 course areas of underperformance identified using the EMF to ensure

	<p>actions were taken to 'close the loop' before NSS 2025 started. As a result of this process only six of the 23 (26%) course areas were flagged again in semester 2.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The combination of central and departmental initiatives to maximise engagement has resulted in a 2.5pp increase in the overall institutional NSS 2025 participation rate (68.8% in NSS 2024 to 71.3% in NSS 2025). • Although the above are positive developments, these should be cautiously interpreted because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ There is a large response rate gap between EMF Apr 25 (23%) and NSS 2025 (71%) limiting the predictive power of the lead indicator. ○ EMF has data gaps, most notable of which are Institute of Policing (HEPS-IoP), CECOS, and Wilkes. ○ West Midlands Police Force have the largest NSS eligible populations in HEPS-IOP and one of the largest in the University. This provision has been in teach out and changes within the Force have both limited the University's ability to influence outcomes as well as created a lack of incentive for the Force to invest time and energy into the partnership. ○ Student concerns over changes to the graduation venue can be a potential drag factor. • Ahead of NSS 2026 we are redesigning the University's student feedback framework focused on agile and local feedback loop closure. A scoping review has been completed and stakeholder consultation on the new approach has recently closed. We are currently reviewing consultation feedback and a proposal for the new approach will be tabled at Academic Board in June 2025. <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raheel Nawaz highlighted that current internal student satisfaction indicators have shown improvements across nearly all NSS thematic areas compared to the previous academic year. However, caution is advised in interpreting these results due to limited response rates and data gaps from significant areas. • Juliet Oosthuysen requested that the governors be informed when the NSS results are published, accompanied by a short top-level commentary. This was agreed. • Raheel Nawaz explained that a full redesign of the internal student feedback mechanisms is underway for roll out in 2025/26, aimed at enhancing the University's ability to proactively engage with, predict, and respond to student feedback. • Precious Ogbein commended the approach to shorten the timescales for the response feedback loop and suggested that further consideration can be given to local ownership. Raheel Nawaz explained that this is the direction of travel for the new internal student feedback mechanisms which will be discussed in the June Academic Board and further Student Union input will be welcome. • Martin Pugh suggested increasing the visibility of student feedback outcomes through a 'You said, we did' style report. Raheel Nawaz and Precious Ogbein confirmed that work is ongoing in collaboration with the Students' Union to reinforce key messages and close feedback loops. <p>There were no further comments and the report was noted.</p>
498	<p>The Marketing Student Recruitment and Admissions Recovery Plan SP/24/16 was introduced for discussion by Ian Blachford, Chief Operating Officer who noted the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The paper introduces the Committee to the Marketing, Student Recruitment and Admissions Recovery Plan, segmented by each of the four student recruitment income streams and outlines the areas that will need to be reviewed, refreshed, rebuilt and then implemented. These areas are displayed within a Gantt chart format, so that the programme is clearly visible and understood. <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ian Blachford briefed the Committee that a plan will be presented at a higher level to the Board of Governors at its next meeting. Whilst work is progressing swiftly, the focus remains on delivering measurable improvements across all income streams for the new recruitment cycle. • Josie Morris raised concerns about the viability of the University addressing all four of the income streams together, and whether there was a need to prioritise the income streams and/or reduce activities within these being reviewed. It was explained that each of the income streams were important to focus upon, however there was some synergy between the international UG and PG income streams. The activities that had been identified to be completed in each area, were important to revisit to understand what opportunities would illicit a more advantageous position in the next cycle. • Juliet Oosthuysen asked about the ability and resilience of the team in supporting the delivery of the Marketing and Student Recruitment Admissions Recovery Plan. Ian Blachford explained that the team is engaged and motivated to address historical challenges and integrate solutions effectively. The COO was now spending circa 90% of time on this recovery plan to ensure that it had leadership, focus and delivered the action plan. • Discussion ensued on the scope of the rebrand which took place last year and the impact of this. It was noted that the brand activity was the highest level of position, however, the focus was now on the translation of this through the different marketing interventions and ensuring the messaging and content is aligned to the target audiences and the student decision-making timeline. • The term "Discovery Day" was questioned and its clarity for parents and students. Ian Blachford explained that Discovery Days tested well with the 17–18 age group and are designed to appeal to those unsure about higher education. Offer Holder Days and Discovery Days are being refined to reduce overlap and improve engagement. He

	<p>added that declining attendance at Open Days signals a need for change. The University was currently undergoing work to ensure that search engine optimization was not compromised with the change in terminology.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ian Blachford proposed that virtual/on-demand Discovery Days are being developed for both domestic and international audiences. Josie Morris highlighted the importance of adapting to the digital-first generation with well-presented content and this proposal was therefore encouraging. • Juliet Oosthuysen asked about the media strategy. Ian Blachford confirmed that a meeting had been scheduled with the current media agency to understand the performance of our campaigns/spend this cycle with him and the Executive Director. Focus would be on cost versus return on investment (linked to the declining application volume). The outputs of this meeting would then be the focus for improving performance in the next cycle and possibly reviewed by a third party to triangulate the current agency performance and proposed way forward. • Martin Pugh emphasized the unsustainable decline in recruitment for September and the need for the plan to succeed. He highlighted the need for smarter use of resources and encouraged calculated risk taking, howsoever managed, to learn and develop. He also suggested monitoring competitor recruitment events for ideas and differentiation. • Juliet Oosthuysen requested that the paper for the Board highlight the current learning and the proposed way forward and future updates on how the recruitment funnel for each income stream was being developed to address previous cycle 'pain points'. <p>There were no further comments and the report was noted for onward referral to the Board.</p>
499	<p>The International Recruitment Strategy SP/24/17 was introduced for discussion by Ian Blachford, Chief Operating Officer. The Marketing, Student Recruitment and Admissions Recovery Plan outlines the activities that need to be reviewed, refreshed, rebuilt and implemented to impact on next cycle.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The International Recruitment Strategy is an important aspect of this and informs two of the four income streams. • There is significant work that needs to be undertaken to move this strategy into implementation. This includes supporting activities including the annual sales plan, the role of agents, marketing collateral and conversion communications. These next steps are explained at a high level in this report and are plotted in work packages in the Recovery Plan. <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ian Blachford outlined a strategic shift in the University's approach to international recruitment in response to major changes in the international recruitment landscape. The new strategy will adopt a more targeted approach prioritising eight high-potential Tier 1 markets, streamline agent partnerships, and enhance efficiency through a data-driven approach to maximise available resources. • Members commended the comprehensive report. The Committee agreed that this should be revisited in future Board meetings, given the high stakes involved and the need for an outstanding team and adequate resources to deliver on strategic goals. • Chris Headleand raised the upcoming government white paper on immigration, and enquired about its potential implications for international education. Ian Blachford provided clarification regarding UKVI guidance and the institution's plan to focus on eight priority markets. He noted that the strategy allows for flexibility with resources being reallocated across markets in response to external factors or emerging opportunities. • Precious Ogbein asked about terminology in the report, specifically the phrase "international rejects". Raheel Nawaz confirmed this is the standard term used in admissions communications in relation to recruitment international or domestic. <p>There were no further comments and the report was noted.</p>
3 FOR INFORMATION	
500	<p>*Update on HE Sector Consultations* SP/24/18</p> <p>The University responds to a number of higher education consultations during the year. It should be noted that since September 2020 we have responded to just over 100 consultations. 19 consultations were responded to in the academic year 2023/24. Since the start of the academic year 2024/25 the University has responded to nine consultations. The three consultations in this report were featured in the report considered by the Committee back in March but the University's formal responses to the consultation were being drafted at the time of the meeting. The paper focuses on the University's responses and the rationale underpinning the responses.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department for Education (DfE) – Franchising in Higher Education • OfS: Proposals for Reforms to OfS Registration Requirements • Ofsted - Improving the way Ofsted Inspects Education <p>Other consultations of note include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major Review of the HESA Staff Record Consultation <p>There were no comments and the report was noted.</p>
501	<p>*Internal Audit – Access and Participation Plan* SP/24/19 – Cross referral from Audit and Risk Committee AR-134-06</p>

	<p>The Access and Participation Plan AR/134/06 – (rated: <i>‘significant assurance with minor improvement opportunities’</i>) The audit reviewed the governance structures in place for providing oversight for the delivery of the APP as well as the processes and controls in place to identify and map data requirements to support the evaluation of planned intervention activities, and if APP data and expenditure is accurately and completely recorded and reported within the OfS return. The overall rating was found to be in line with Management’s expectation.</p> <p>Raheel Nawaz highlighted the positive outcome of the audit and confirmed that the resulting actions are being followed up. He noted that the variation request will be submitted before December.</p> <p>There were no further comments and the report was noted.</p>
4 ADDITIONAL MATTERS	
502	There were no additional matters.
503	<p>Items to be referred to Board of Governors</p> <p>APPROVED a) Minute 498 - Marketing Student Recruitment and Admissions Recovery Plan SP/24/16</p> <p>INFORMATION b) Minute 487 - KPI Scorecard SP/24/04</p>
504	Next meeting: Wednesday 5 November 2025, CA 306 Catalyst, Leek Road