

People Committee

TIME /DATE / VENUE	0900, Thursday 2 October 2025 in Room 0.32, Unit 1, St Andrew's Court
PRESENT	Mark Readman (Chair) Stacey Parrinder-Johnson Helen Astle Professor Graham Galbraith
IN ATTENDANCE	Professor Sandy Pepper, External Governor Professor Sherria Hoskins, Provost Dr Michelle Hale, Academic Staff Governor (from Min 7) Fiona Hnatow, Chief People Officer Wayne Bowen, Deputy Chief People Officer Karen Tiller, Deputy Director of People Operations (Min 12) Stephanie Clark, Employment Lawyer (Min 6) Yvonne Howard, Director of Student Equity (Mins 7 and 8 only) James Ross, Equality and Diversity Information Co-Ordinator (Mins 7 and 8 only) Professor Jo Corbett, Deputy Associate Dean Research & Innovation (REF), Faculty of Science and Health (Min 10)
SECRETARIAT	Paul Mould, Director of Corporate Governance Jacqui Bryden, Senior Governance Officer

To facilitate the attendance of staff for specific items, some items were taken out of the order designated in the agenda.

1 Welcome, Quoracy, Conflict of Interest and Apologies

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting.

- 1.1 There were no apologies.
- 1.2 The Executive Director of Corporate Governance confirmed that the meeting was quorate and could proceed to business.
- 1.3 There were no conflicts of interest declared.

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 May 2025 were confirmed as an accurate record.

3 Matters Actioned and Matters Arising

- 3.1 Action was reported within the agenda papers on two items: to be heard on the agenda.
- 3.2 There were no other matters arising.

4 People Committee - confidential

5 Annual Review of the Terms of Reference

Paul Mould, Executive Director of Corporate Governance presented a report on the assessment of the work undertaken by the Committee in 2024/25 when mapped against its terms of reference, the draft Committee terms of reference for 2025/2026 and an indicative work programme for the academic year 2025/26.

5.1 In discussion, it was noted that:

- i. The assessment of Committee business for 2024/2025 indicated that the Committee had discharged its Terms of Reference.
- ii. The draft Terms and Reference 2025/2026 and indicative committee business for 2025/2026 were not reviewed or discussed following the item about the future of the People Committee.

5.2 Following discussion, the Committee:

- i. Noted the assessment for the year 2024/2025 and agreed its assurance to the Board that it has discharged its terms of reference.
- ii. Did not agree the draft Terms of Reference 2025/2026 or consider the indicative committee business.
- iii. Approved that a paper would be tabled at the Board meeting on 8 October 2025 to recommend disestablishment of the People Committee and to make recommendations about the future consideration of people matters to the Board.

6 Managing Sickness Absence Policy - confidential

7 EDI Student and Colleague Data Reports 2023/2024

Yvonne Howard, Director of Student Equity and James Ross, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Information Officer presented the data reports about equality, diversity and inclusion for both students and staff colleagues for the academic year 2023/2024.

7.1 There were five key points to be noted in the reports:

Student EDI report

- i. The number of UG UK domiciled students with a disability increased from 20% to 30% over the last four years since 2019/2020. The types of disability indicated that 34% had a learning disability and 27% had a mental health issue, both of which had grown. In response, the University provided more guidance and support and undertook regular accessibility audits to continue to improve physical access.
- ii. The proportion of students who contacted Student Wellbeing for support was unchanged from last year at 9%. There were differences in the type of student that sought support and male PGM students remained the least likely to seek help. Compared to an overall student progression rate of 85%, progression rates for PGM males was lower at 77%. The University would review wellbeing activities and create more outreach events to identify the barriers to access support. The PGM ambassadors provided student-led spaces to enable open discussion and access.

- iii. Progression rates for UG UK domiciled students had improved or levelled since the pandemic in the categories of sex, ethnicity and disability and reduced for over 25-year-old students from 83% to 82%. There had been a modest overall reduction in the awarding gap and there would be an increase focus to continue the reduction by the provision of culturally appropriate pastoral support and outreach activity with schools.

Staff EDI report

- iv. The number of academic and research colleagues who declared disability had increased in the last year from 9% to 12%. The ethnicity of academic colleagues had increased from 15% to 21% since 2019/2020 compared to the national average of 22%. In professional services, the national average was 15% and the University was 8%. It was important to support professional staff with career development opportunities, the introduction of a pilot mentoring scheme for PGM staff and to access University graduates as a source of recruitment.
- v. There was an increase in the number of female staff in research roles to 53% compared to 42% last year. The number of female professors was stubborn and remained at 26% which is 5 percentage points below the national average. Associate professors had increased over the last five years from 30% to 42% and indicated that succession planning would improve the figure for female professors. The percentage of PGM professors was 20% compared to the national average of 13% although female PGM professors remained lower and work would continue to improve the number over the next five years.

7.2 In discussion, it was noted that:

- i. The report provided useful insight and analysis. Overall the rate of labour turnover across the University was low although higher in junior academic roles.
- ii. The Reset programme had sought to create suitable alternative roles to avoid redundancies, and a number of staff had been redeployed into other roles but did not change the overall representation. Work would be undertaken on improving talent acquisition and there was a workstream on placement opportunities.
- iii. Students with mental health issues might not wish to attend larger-scale recruitment or development events and advisers would provide personal support for those affected.

7.3 Following discussion, the Committee noted the reports, the improvements achieved and the work to be done.

8 Race Equality Charter Interim Progress Report

Yvonne Howard, Director of Student Equity and James Ross, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Information Officer presented the interim progress report on the submission for the silver award under the Race Equality Charter. A race and equality survey was undertaken in June 2025 to support the submission in 2026.

8.1 The key points noted were:

- i. The response rate for the survey was 45% which was up from 33% from the previous survey. The response from PGM staff had increased as well.
- ii. Recruitment of PGM staff has exceeded the recruitment target of 12.5% to 27% of all new starters, which had had the impact of reducing the ethnicity pay gap against the sector average of 6.4%

- iii. The PGM awarding gap has reduced by three percentage points to 15% and it was important to monitor the trend over the next three years to continue the downward progression to the University target of 10%.
 - iv. The key actions that had been undertaken over the last year were:
 - a. The introduction of effective governance for managing racial equality.
 - b. The increase in PGM staff representation.
 - c. The elimination of the ethnicity pay gap.
 - d. The work to progress reduction of the awarding gap
 - e. An effective communications plan to achieve an inclusive culture and environment.
 - v. The University had tried to implement anonymous recruitment, but it was identified that the action had not made a difference and that CVs were required to attract a wide range of talent.
 - vi. The new Personal Development Review had facilitated increased satisfaction with career development for PGM staff who felt that there was more opportunity for career development. Conversely, white colleagues indicated a decrease in satisfaction and would be monitored.
 - vii. PGM staff indicated that they felt more included within their teams and that white staff felt enabled to challenge poor behaviour which created a safe space for PGM colleagues.
 - viii. The intersectional data indicated that PGM staff with a disability reported lower positive responses in general and highlighted a need to determine why and to focus on intersectionality.
 - ix. The support of the executive and the Board was essential to success.
- 8.2 Following discussion, the Committee noted the report and the positive progress that had been made.

9 University's Mental Health Charter

Fiona Hnatow, Chief People Officer presented an update on the progress of the University's mental Health Charter.

- 9.1 The key points noted were:
- i. The work to gain the University Mental Health Charter was very resource-intensive and required complex and considerable input to achieve. The Charter itself and the company that ran it provided little support and the costs had raised concerns about the value for money that would be gained from achieving the Charter.
 - ii. The four domains had been marked against the charter's Principles of Good Practice to complete a gap analysis.
 - iii. Progress had been reviewed at the executive People and Culture Committee and UEB would discuss the review and costs to consider a pause.
- 9.2 In discussion, it was noted that:
- i. The achievement of the Mental Health Charter would be a desirable future aspiration, but the time intensity could be focused on higher priorities within the University.

- ii. The University already had a range of internal resources to support mental health and address mental concerns promptly and safely.

9.3 Following discussion, the Committee noted the report.

10 Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2029

Professor Jo Corbett, Deputy Associate Dean Research & Innovation (REF), Faculty of Science and Health presented an update on the progress of the submission for REF 2029 which included a new section about people and engagement, weighted at 25% of the overall contribution.

10.1 The key points noted were:

- i. The value of the REF to the University was approximately £11m through block grant funding for research and it was important to achieve recognition for REF submissions.
- ii. The research for submission would be completed for submission by December 2028 for the REF in 2029. There were 34 subject areas with the REF and like the submission in 2021, the University would submit research in 16 of these subject areas.
- iii. The nature of the REF was challenging in each iteration because the rules were subject to rapid change. The most significant change for REF 2029 was that assessment would be based on research contracts and not individual researchers. However, the same research cases could be submitted to a multiple range of subject areas and it was important to ensure that the best outputs were submitted to the relevant unit of assessment.
- iv. At the current time, REF had been paused by Research England until Christmas 2025 to rebalance the elements of the exercise which created further change and challenge for submissions.
- v. In addition, the REF codes of practice and equality impact assessments were still in development for university consultation later and the open access policy requirement had been subject to a lack of clarity. Decisions on these elements were anticipated after Christmas when the University would be able to reassess options and review research for submission.
- vi. The lack of direction and support from Research England was a cause for frustration and it was important that the University remained adaptable and that the University researchers were supported to continue to produce excellent research outputs.

10.2 In discussion, it was noted that:

- i. The change to submit research based on contracts rather than individuals had reduced stress for individuals, and in particular, the last REF had been submitted during the pandemic which had created a stressful environment for researchers.
- ii. The Committee expressed its thanks for the work undertaken to coordinate REF 2029 and the support provided to academics and researchers.

10.3 Following discussion, the Committee noted the update.

11 Professional Services Transformation Update - confidential

12 HR Workforce Analysis Dashboard

Karen Tiller, Deputy Director of People Operations provided an update on the University's workforce

people data.

12.1 The key points noted were:

- i. Power BI analytic data had been launched on 1 April 2025 and Phase 2 that provided absence analytics would be launched in October 2025 to all grade 10 managers and above.
- ii. Phase 3 would be launched to provide data about equality, diversity and inclusivity in 2026.
- iii. The absence data provided a snapshot of the amount and costs of absence as a snapshot over a specified period of time and could be interrogated further to defined parameters such as short, medium and long periods of sickness absence.
- iv. The heatmap data provided a high-level overview to identify specific problem areas to facilitate the effective management of absence.
- v. The new Personal Development Review system had been launched on 1 August 2025 for colleagues to set their objectives and check-ins would commence from 1 November 2025.
- vi. There had been good feedback on the simpler system and there was a number of resources that had been provided online and in-person to support users. As of 2 October 2025, 12% had completed their objective setting.
- vii. The Staff Survey had been launched on 1 October 2025 and within a day, 16% of colleagues had completed the survey.

12.2 In discussion, it was noted that the progress of the programme to launch management information and data insight had been very successful and was essential in modernising ways of working.

12.3 Following discussion, the Committee noted the update.

13 Date of Next Meeting

Pending the approval of the Board to disestablish the People Committee, the dates for the People Committee in 2026 would be cancelled.

The Chair thanked the Committee members for their active participation in the matters of the People Committee.

Confidential Minutes

4. Future of the People Committee

Professor Sandy Pepper, External Governor presented a discussion paper on the future remit of the People Committee. The key points noted were:

- 4.1 As part of the Board effectiveness review undertaken in 2024, there had been discussion about the future of the People Committee during which differing views were expressed. Following discussion, the Board had decided to retain the people Committee albeit with a revised focus. Since that discussion, recruitment of governors with the appropriate relevant experience had been lower than anticipated and it was important to make the best use of the external governors' time to be able to focus on strategic matters. The Scheme of Delegations had identified that the People Committee had fewer items for strategic discussion and approval, and it would be timely to review the remit and purpose of the committee.
- 4.2 It was important that the Board should focus on items of regulation, statutory requirement or legal requirement at a strategic level. A review of the minutes of the last meeting, the review of committee business to the Terms of Reference and the indicative business for the coming year indicated that the remit of the committee did not meet the strategic focus of the Board.
- 4.3 Comments were invited for discussion.
- 4.4 In discussion, a range of views were noted:
 - i. Over the last year, the People Committee agenda items had been mainly for note and little for approval apart from three updated HR policies. It was important to review the committee's remit and potentially become an advisory committee for UEB to provide assurance on risk factors, and to become more proactive in setting the agenda to ensure a strategic focus.
 - ii. The committee was not as effective as it should be, and it was unusual that it was not linked to a finance or resource function. Apart from HR policy approvals, agenda items tended to be items for information that had already been discussed at executive level in the University People and Culture Committee. Strategic HR items, such as the Professional Services Transformation Programme and survey outcomes should be discussed at Board level.
 - iii. The People Committee had undergone various orientations over the last ten years but had not added value to the business of the Board. For example, the LGPS pension had been discussed at the Finance and Infrastructure Committee and not the People Committee for decision at the Board. The Executive oversaw the operational work of the University's People and Culture Committee.
 - iv. It was important that the role of the governors was manageable and facilitated effective use of their time and commitment. There was the potential for governors to attend more events to gain a greater understanding of the day-to-day work of the University.
 - v. The Chief People Officer could provide potentially an annual update and strategic focus to the Board annually or more frequently as deemed appropriate. A focus on the culture of the University should be incorporated into the remits of other areas such as KPIs or through a deep-dive discussion at the Board.
 - vi. A staff governor could be invited to join the University's People and Culture Committee to provide a different perspective and governor view. It was important to not lose sight of

people matters and ensure that there was Board oversight and scrutiny.

- vii. The sector had noted that employee relations could be improved and the role of the Board was to keep people motivated, so a direct report to the whole Board would be an effective operating model because it was very important to the success of the University. The Board would need to discuss and provide clarity on what it required to oversee and scrutinise in the future.
 - viii. The Chair summarised two potential options:
 - a. To disestablish the People Committee to be replaced with a regular report from the Chief People Officer and to discuss strategic items at the Board for decision.
 - b. Should the approach above not be effective, to establish a new committee with a revised strategic focus.
 - ix. The Board had sought to become more effective following its review through delegation and the introduction of the unanimous consent agenda and was a work in progress.
- 4.5 Following discussion, the Committee agreed to make the following recommendations to the Board in order to add value:
- i. Disestablish the People Committee with immediate effect.
 - ii. Appoint a staff governor to join the University People and Culture Committee creating a connection with the Board like that between the Board and the Academic Council.
 - iii. A standing item for the Chief People Officer to provide regular updates from the Executive Committee to the Board; potentially three times per year, including a strategic overview at the start of the year and a progress review during the year and one strategic deep dive per year focused on people matters within the Strategic Plan.
 - iv. Improved agenda setting, facilitated by a pre-Board meeting between the Chair of the Board, the Vice-Chancellor, and the Executive Director of Corporate Governance. The Governance Services team will work with the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Board to ensure that all work previously allocated to the People Committee (as set out in its Terms of Reference and indicative business paper) is appropriately reassigned to other sub-committees or incorporated into the Board agenda.
 - v. The Statement of Primary Responsibilities for the Board and Risk Register will be reviewed and amended as necessary to reflect this change.
 - vi. Should the proposed approach does not deliver the expected benefits, alternative arrangements will be considered.

6. Managing Sickness Absence and Ill-Health Policy

Stephanie Clark, Employment Lawyer presented the draft updated Managing Sickness Absence and Ill-Health Policy for approval in accordance with the Protocol on HR Policy Approvals. The key points noted were:

- 6.1 The policy had been updated as part of the HR project to update core staff policies to improve language and accessibility for all users. The next policy for review was Capability and Performance.
- 6.2 The principal changes were:
 - i. Sickness absence would be recorded by managers which had been recorded previously by



the individual and had led to inaccuracy in reporting of sickness absence.

- ii. Sickness absence had been monitored using trigger points which would change to using the Bradford factor. There was little difference between the use of trigger points and the Bradford factor, although the Bradford factor facilitated greater focus through the use of a numeric formula.
- 6.3 The Bradford factor had been used previously and was incorporated into the ITrent HR system. Research had been undertaken into other methods, and it was important to use a robust system for managers to manage issues effectively and promptly to reduce the cost of sickness absence and, in particular, for managing short-term, frequent sickness absence.
 - 6.4 The entitlement to sick pay would remain the same. Return to work interviews had been required under the current policy but had been applied inconsistently and it would become mandatory through ITrent. The purpose was to ensure that there was regular contact with the individual and that support could be provided at an earlier stage.
 - 6.5 Referrals to the external occupational health service where necessary would be the joint responsibility of the manager in conjunction with HR to ensure earlier support was made available.
 - 6.6 The appeal process was not included within the new policy and was a separate standalone appeals policy.
 - 6.7 The updated policy had a specific section on the management of terminal illnesses and was new to the document.
 - 6.8 In discussion, it was noted that:
 - i. It was a specific aim of the updated policy to address the issues that had been raised in the practical application of the current policy such as annual leave carry-forward and sickness absence reporting. There had been evidence of abuse of the current policy, and it was important to ensure that individuals understood their mutual responsibilities.
 - ii. Reporting sickness absence by telephone or by email could be clarified as well as some of the wording about contact during the period of absence and carrying accrued annual leave forward. Local arrangements for individual cases could be agreed with advice from HR.
 - iii. The process and wording had been subject to full consultation with the Trades Unions and staff networks, and both Unions had carried out ballots to approve the implementation of the updated process.
 - iv. The review and updating the policy had been long overdue. The updated policy ensured that concerns including careful management of terminal illness and supportive, early monitoring were addressed. Neurodiversity had increased recently and required appropriate support. Both managers and HR would be able to identify patterns and heat spots in absenteeism earlier.
 - v. Managers would be provided with training through drop-ins, HR business partner support, toolkits and templates. There would be a communication plan for all staff on the new policy and individual responsibilities prior to launch in January 2026.
 - 6.9 Following discussion, the Committee approved the Sickness Absence and Ill Health Policy.

11 Professional Services Transformation Update

Fiona Hnатов, Chief People Officer provided a presentation on the Professional Services Transformation. Since the last Committee meeting, the governance of the programme had been established through a Programme Board with appointed sponsor, managers and workstream leads.

11.1 The key points noted were:

- i. The two internal workstream had commenced on faculty transformation and academic leadership and the third workstream would be externally focused on leveraging external gains would commence shortly.
- ii. No reduction in staff would be anticipated, and the aim was to create a more efficient structure.
- iii. The report about the discovery work would be presented to the Board.

11.2 Following discussion, the Committee noted the update.