

COU.24/25:47

Meeting:	Council OGM
Date:	Monday 3 rd March 2025 – 6.00pm
Venue:	33 Bedford Square & Via Zoom

PRESENT	Catherine du Toit (CduT)	President & Chair
	Ravin Ponniah (RP)	Vice-President
	Mark Bassett (MBa)	
	Sara Biscaya (SB)	
	Trevor Bolton (TB)	
	Alison Brooks (AB)	
	Mark Burch (MBu)	
	Pui Quan Choi (PC)	
	Omotayo Emdem (OE)	
Via Zoom	Susannah Hagan (SH)	
	Béné Jakel (BJ)	
	Caspar Llewellyn Smith (CLS)	
	Simine Marine (SMa)	
	Steve Mertz (SM)	
	Ingrid Schroder (IS)	School Director
	Ben Stirling (BS)	
	Cindy Walters (CW)	
	Steven Ware (SW)	
IN ATTENDANCE		
	Mike Aling (MA)	Head of Teaching
	Anna Font Vacas (AFV)	Head of Learning
	Rob Scully (RS)	Head of Finance
Via Zoom	Louise Wilkins (LW)	Company Secretary
	Amanda Vidler	Assistant to the Company Secretary

1. Welcome and Apologise

CduT welcomed all members of Council and attendees particularly Omotayo Emdem and Mark Burch who were joining the meeting as members for the first time.

No apologies had been received. One member of Council joined the meeting via Zoom along with Company Secretary.

CduT invited Council to declare any new conflicts of interest. PQ Choi advised of an upcoming change and will provide the details to LW by email, otherwise no new declarations were declared.

2. Minutes and Action Points

The minutes of the Council meeting held on 18th November 2024 were approved.

IS confirmed the action for a meeting to be organised for the School Community to be introduced to the Freedom of Speech Code of Practice and AA Media and Social Media Guidelines would take place next term.

CduT reminded members of Council of the need to confirm availability for a visit to Hooke Park on the 10th May, by Monday 10th March so arrangements can be finalised.

It was noted Council had agreed by email to the appointment of Mark Bassett as new trustee of the AA Staff Retirement Benefits Plan. CduT thanked Mark Bassett on behalf of Council for agreeing to take up this role.

Confirmation was provided to Council that the Annual Financial return was made to the OfS as per the resolution passed by Council on 18 November 2024.

CduT advised Council of a letter that had been received from OfS which confirmed that the Chair and governing body were able to make a representation on the proposed extension of DAP for a further 3 years. IS confirmed that the opportunity to make representations is being reviewed by LW. Council agreed that CduT would be copied into the School's response and noted that this would lead to an extension of Taught Degree Awarding Powers to September 2028. CdT made Council aware of a meeting that chairs of Higher Education governing bodies had been invited to by OfS which CduT would attend.

Actions from previous meeting were noted as completed, on the agenda or were due to come to a future meeting.

3. School Director's Report

3.1 The School Director's report being paper COU.24/25:34 was received by Council and questions were welcomed, IS noted the report is set out to relate to each section of the Strategic Plan and was broadly on track.

Council heard that numbers for postgraduate programmes are beginning to come back up and if any programme has low numbers, a review will be undertaken with the relevant staff. It was noted the new Conservation and Reuse programme has already attracted a good level of applications. The draft budget work has started and this will include a worst-case scenario budget particularly important as the global economic situation is so difficult to predict.

Council heard that an application for the USA federal loan system had been paused due to the high cost of audit compliance requirements for federal loans and the special skills such a compliance role would require. This pause will be reviewed if applications from the USA increase this year.

An update on Montague Street was provided, and the student experience was discussed. IS informed the Committee of the significant work undertaken by Anna Font Vacas, Head of Learning which has been led by students. There are noticeable improvements in use of the space and there are new lockers, a coffee machine and the School has begun hosting AA events in the space, and there are plans for an exhibition later in the year.

3.2 Fundraising Framework

Council received the Fundraising Framework being paper COU.24/25:35 and heard that the framework is a consolidation of the key fundraising strategies set out in the Strategic Plan with three areas of development:

- Financial support of students and widening access to a cohort from more diverse backgrounds;
- The development of academic and research programmes that connect the AA to an international collaborative network and provide career progression for AA staff;
- The renewal of infrastructure and academic resources to provide better access, more suitable spaces for teaching and to operate more sustainably.

Noting that the short-term fundraising priorities are:

- Alumni funding subscriptions - to support student bursaries and hardship
- Named full scholarships from individual donors and foundations
- Programme and Research Development funding
- Chairs, Shelves and Tables Campaign as part of the Library Refurbishment

Council heard that the Accelerate membership is providing an essential outreach opportunity. There is also the development of a membership section to the website which will be key in supporting the membership network. IS is undertaking visits to various regions and having conversations with the members and asking for support whilst reconnecting the network of AA members. IS noted the School supports the majority of the scholarship and bursaries funding from the operational budget with only a small percentage coming from AA Foundation. It was noted that new trustees are being recruited for AA Foundation and the hope is these can be people who can actively support the AA through fundraising.

IS welcomed suggestions and ideas from Council on corporate sponsorship opportunities for items such as the audio-visual equipment.

Feedback from the last Director's Forum meeting with the School Community identified that the visibility of financial support needed to increase, and work is being carried out to create a scholarship finder on the website. BJ proposed allocating the administration of all scholarships and bursaries to one member of the Admissions team, who could also support with the forms to be completed as they can be challenging to understand.

Council discussion focused on the reliance on the School Director to achieve the fundraising targets and the need for additional support. Discussion continued around the role of architectural practices and how support could be requested from them, and if not financial then supporting through the giving of time e.g. on juries or mentoring. Larger organisations should be approached for specific pieces of equipment or software which are mainly used by the architectural profession.

IS confirmed the launch of the campaign to refurbish the library will commence with a celebration tea with invited AA members. Council suggested, for any appeal for fundraising projects there is a carefully packaged information pack. IS welcomed support from Council members in developing the fundraising work.

CduT thanked everyone for their contributions and that further ideas or suggestions should be provided to IS by email.

3.3 Academic Board Report (Q1)

Council approved the Academic Board Report (Q1) being paper COU.24/25:36,

3.4 Staff Survey Report and Action Plan

Council received the Staff Survey Report and Action Plan, being paper COU.24/25:37.

Council noted this was the first staff survey and therefore benchmarking wasn't possible. The ambition is to increase participation rates for the next survey, likely in 18 months, and this should be achieved through staff trusting that action will be taken as a result of the outcomes. Staff have also contributed feedback at a meeting organised by HR to discuss wellbeing and this has a follow-up session planned for next week.

It was noted that the response rate is fairly low in academic staff, but it was highlighted that academic staff have a large number of part-time staff which will have affected the response rate.

IS confirmed that further review of the survey data is required and then the results will be shared with staff with a comprehensive summary, and action plan. Council agreed that the SMT must be engaged with the process and that clear messaging is required that the feedback from staff has been heard and acted upon. The survey results will now be reviewed by the SMT Operations group and then smaller group meetings arranged with departments (grouped) for further discussions on issues highlighted by the survey.

Council suggested that the survey provider might be best placed to present the outcomes to staff and that as much of the data as possible should be shared. Overall Council were pleased that the survey results were encouraging and more positive than the sector average.

CduT thanked IS and HR for the survey, report, and update.

4 Corporate Governance, Compliance and Committee reporting

4.1 Estates and Infrastructure Committee Report

Council received the Chair's Report being paper COU.24/25:38.

4.2 Academic Assurance Committee Report

Council noted there has not been a meeting since the last update.

Council received the ARB reform update being paper COU.24/25:39.

Council noted the I-TDAP update had been received at the beginning of the meeting. ACTION

4.3 Nominations, Remuneration and Governance Committee Report

Council received the paper Chair's Report being COU.24/25:40. The following resolutions were passed by Council: -

Resolutions

- Council appoint Ravin Ponniah as Chair of the Nomination, Remuneration and Governance Committee from 1 June 2025
- Council appoints Sara Biscaya to be a member of Finance and Audit Committee from 1 June 2025
- Council note that Ravin Ponniah will no longer be a member of the Finance and Audit Committee, and Estate and Infrastructure Committee from 1 June 2025.

It was noted the Cindy Walters is willing to be considered as Chair of the Estates & Infrastructure Committee, but this will be confirmed at the meeting in May. ACTION

4.4 Finance & Audit Committee Report

Council received the Chair's Report being paper COU.24/25:41

Financial Framework and Scheme of Delegation report being paper COU.24/25:42 was approved by Council.

5 Understanding Risk Discussion

A presentation on understanding and identifying risk was facilitated by Mark Bassett with discussion by Council on risks faced by the AA and the risk appetite of the organisation.

Following the presentation discussion focused on how the AA reviews its risks noting that Council relies on three key documents, the Risk Register, Risk Management Framework and Policy and the AA's Strategic Plan. Council considered how the key risks were being mitigated and managed, and highlighted that Cybersecurity is a standalone risk on the Register. Council discussed mitigation measures for managing the risk that the School doesn't remain relevant to students and future employers and the need to ensure the AA fosters a wide spectrum of students and employment opportunities, and ensuring students are equipped to enter the profession. Council welcomed the idea of creating an incubator to support graduates.

It was noted that insurance is important for mitigating the financial impact of risks, and it was noted the tender for insurance broker services being undertaken would provide a good opportunity to review the insurance against the risk register.

CduT thanked MB for a very interesting and thought-provoking presentation.

5.1 Risk Register

Council received the Risk Register being paper COU.24/25:43, noting it has been scrutinised by the Finance & Audit Committee.

6 AOB

Council was invited to propose ideas for future discussion topics and to send to CduT, RP and LW via email

En bloc items:

Conflict of Interest Policy – COU.24/25:44 was approved

Data Protection Policy – COU.24/24:45 was approved.

CduT thanked everyone for their contributions. As there was no other business the meeting concluded at 20.24hrs.

Actions arising from meeting on 3 March 2025

	Action	Owner	Due Date
A1	Review of the OfS I-TDAP letter and draft of response to be shared with CduT	LW	Completed
A2	Resolution to appoint CW as Chair of Estates & Infrastructure Committee at the next meeting	LW	On Agenda

Action arising from previous AA Council meeting on 3 June 2024

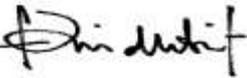
	Action	Owner	Due Date
A3	Discussion at a future Council meeting to be held on the strategy for research at the AA	RP/LW	July 2025

Action arising from AA Council meeting on 15 July 2024

	Action	Owner	Due Date
A4	Conversation on membership, its criteria, payment and right to vote would be included within the cycle of business for next year	LW	End of July 2025

Action arising from AA Council meeting on 18 November 2024

	Action	Owner	Due Date
A4	Freedom of Speech Code of Practice – approved, noting that the School Community need to be introduced to the Code and Social Media Guidelines, so they understand the context and reasons for the rules	IS and LW	Completed

Chair: 

Signed: 19th May 2025