



University Council

Paper no: 2025-11-24-03

Paper title: Minutes of Council meeting held 29 October 2025

Minutes of the Council meeting held on 29 October 2025, in LR17, CMDC

Present: Ferguson, Iain (Chair); Day, Colin; Greening, Connie; Holford, Karen; Longhurst, Phil; Masood, Samina; Nickson, Aileen; Osagie, Solomon; Price, Jo; Stokes, Claire; Watkins, Peter; Zeidler, Phil

Absence: Greatrex, John; Hart, Ian; Upadhyia, Rachna

Attending: Churchill, Rebecca; Douglas, Gregor; Sibbald, Ian; Terry, Leon (for item 4)

1. Introduction

The Chair welcomed members to the Council meeting.

2. Disclosure of interest

There were no disclosures of interest.

3. Minutes of previous meeting; Note of Chair's action and matters arising [2025-10-29-03a and b]

The minutes and notes of meetings on 17 July 2025 and Chair's action on 1 August 2025 were approved. There were no matters arising.

4a. Report from the University Executive [2025-10-29-04a]

The main report was taken as read; the following items were discussed:

4.1 *Health, Safety and Wellbeing (HSW) Annual Report 2024/2025 [Appendix A]*

Leon Terry joined for this item

- (a) In summary Cranfield continued to make progress in improving the HSW environment. It was recognised that elements of the HSW strategic plan (launched in December 2024) required continued effort for example, fully embedding the H&S culture, and behaviours, across the University; there was too much reliance upon H&S leadership and team to identify risk, mitigation, and resolution. Council was grateful to the Chair of HSW Committee, the H&S Team, and People & Culture for their contributions.
- (b) Key items to bring to Council's attention included: the generator explosion (non-RIDDOR reportable); H&S spot checks; the radiation amnesty; engagement via the Specialist Safety Groups; the process for vacating university buildings which included sign-off by Facilities and H&S before work could commence; the impact of the change programme.
- (c) Council recommended that overall, completion of the H&S Essentials training module required improvement. In terms of specialist training modules, it was not clear from the table if these were mandatory modules and whether they had been completed by all staff that required that level of training. Non-completion of training modules was monitored by line managers, and Faculty/PS Leads.
- (d) Encouraging local responsiveness was key. It had been necessary to place an order of closure on a laboratory as identified HSW risks had not been addressed quickly enough. That approach would continue, signalling the importance of stopping weak practice. This was particularly the case for technical facilities with risk to life, such as CH2i. Cranfield

had to continue to improve culture, behaviours and practice, by whatever means it could.

Resolved:(i) Council requested full transparency of the HSW areas that required specialist training modules, the number of staff required to complete those modules, completion rates, and gap analysis

Action: LT

(ii) Council approved the high level HSW Annual Plan 2025/2026.

Leon Terry withdrew from the meeting

4.2 *OfS Updates – Financial Sustainability Review (Project Boron)*

Since November 2024 the University had engaged with the OfS review of financial sustainability with KPMG engaged to conduct the work (titled Project Boron) from May 2025. The KPMG met university officers and reviewed large volumes of financial and related documentation. Following the successful extension of the RCF, and OfS having approved Cranfield's revised Student Protection Plan, OfS confirmed that it had received sufficient assurance and would not proceed with stage 2 of scrutiny, nor apply specific conditions of registration. Quarterly meetings with OfS and sharing of relevant documentation had been put in place for the next year. The Project Boron report would be considered by Audit & Risk Committee in the first instance. OfS had advised that financial sustainability reports would not be published.

4.3 *HEIF Funding*

Council was briefed on HEIF funding, dependencies and actions that the University had taken to improve its reporting of financial data to support Cranfield's position in the top 25 institutions.

4b. **Chief Executive and Vice-Chancellor's (CEVC) Report [2025-10-29-04b]**

The report was taken as read; the following additional items were raised:

(a) *Global Trade and Investment delegation*

A delegation of His Majesty's Trade Commissioners and Investment Directors from the Department of Business and Trade had visited Cranfield in October to explore investment and growth opportunities in the region. The delegation of diplomatic investment officials included senior representatives for Europe, the Middle East and Pakistan, North America, Asia and Africa as well as Directors from the Office for Investment, Department for Business and Trade and the Oxford to Cambridge Growth Corridor.

(b) *University Executive structure*

It had been announced that the PVC-CDS was retiring from Cranfield and that role would not be replaced on University Executive. The PVC-Education was stepping back from this role, with a revised role of PVC-Education and Research on University Executive. It was anticipated that the PVC-E&R would be supported through delegation to Directors of Education and Directors of Research, details of which were being worked through.

(c) *Defence and Innovation Industry Alliance (DIIA)*

Cranfield was the only University to be a founding partner in the new alliance with defence industry giants convened by Ploughshare, the MoD trusted commercialisation partner. There were opportunities for funding and a strong call to recruit more STEM qualified people into the services. Investment in the development of Defence Colleges, another government initiative, had not been raised at the DIIA. Cranfield would be well placed to deliver such requirements with its innovation, test, and research and development expertise and facilities.

(d) Government was minded to put a levy on international students of 6%. Universities continued to lobby against this, both individually and collectively; this was seen as another major blow to the sector.

(e) *Partnerships and Alliances*

The Council and Executive Working Group (CEWG) was reviewing options for Cranfield and when, and if appropriate, would consult more widely. Any decision on the future corporate arrangements for Cranfield was reserved to Council.

Resolved: (i) Council offered to facilitate communication between Cranfield and the investment minister. **Action: CEVC/PZ**

(ii) Council offered to advise on MoD, government and investment opportunities within the Oxford - Cambridge corridor. **Action: CEVC/PW**

(iii) Council asked for terms of reference for CEWG. **Action: CEVC/SGD**

5. Transformational Change Programme update [2025-10-29-05]

5.1 Progress of the change programme was reported. The voluntary redundancy consultation period had ended, some members of staff had already left, some were working through their various notice periods. Some counterproposals had been accepted. It had been necessary to move to compulsory redundancies, and in some areas University Executive was carefully considering counterproposals.

5.2 External help had been brought in to support process reviews of Applicant Journey and Timetabling. A “low-code no-code” approach would facilitate and speed up business-as-usual improvements. Council cautioned as to the importance of ensuring that processes were right before automation and noted that there were opportunities for new processes to be put in place. Cultural and behavioural changes were also important.

5.3 Council recognised that a significant amount of work had been undertaken within a short time frame. On ensuring that plans had been radical enough and would deliver necessary savings, a fixed term post to track benefits was being advertised internally. The role would provide dedicated financial support to the Change Programme, ensuring robust tracking and reporting of financial benefits against the agreed five-year financial plan.

5.5 The CEVC would address all staff at VC Live in November. Feedback from staff was that they were looking for vision for the future and the routes to get there, as well as a sense of benefits achieved by actions so far. Staff morale, talent retention, and business as usual were also important considerations, and succession planning looking ahead.

5.6 There was a wide-ranging discussion of the pressures on staff and the impact on the student experience arising from the confluence of the start of term and the end of redundancy consultation periods. Notice of course withdrawals from 2026 had created uncertainty for part-time starters in 2025. Course teams in the most affected areas were being supported.

Resolved: Council welcomed the shared understanding of the five pillars of the change programme and the development of the commercial function with its focus on B2B activities. Council asked that future updates include more material on impact on student experience and other unintended consequences. **Action: RC.**

Council offered support on developing commercial KPIs / measures of success. **Action: RC/CD**

6. Update from Council committees

6.1 *Audit & Risk Committee*

Audit & Risk Committee was due to meet again on 7 November 2025, when focus would be on the Annual Academic and Skills Report, cyber security and the Committee's draft annual report which would be presented to Council in

Decembers. The Committee would also be reflecting on learning from the Gillies report, internal audit annual report, internal audit report on employee expenses, and Global Internal Audit Standards and related material.

6.2 *Finance Committee*

(a) Finance Committee had met earlier in the day and had received an update on the Change Programme; the management accounts to 31 July 2025 and 30 September 2025; and a presentation on student numbers. The Director of Finance reported that Research income was £1.8m down though may be affected by time sheet issues and delays in coding, award bearing was ahead and professional development on track. Staff costs were better than budgeted as there had been 105 MARS leavers (40 budgeted) which brought savings forward. Bursary costs were down. Defra was due to deliver a £180K payment at the end of November; delivery on milestones was required to secure the full £5M budgeted for the year. There was a discussion of Defra licencing and HEIF funding. It was agreed that it was essential to deliver and secure funding this year.

(b) The presentation on student numbers was shared with Council and was followed by a broad discussion around student recruitment, the agent model used across the sector and how that worked at Cranfield, agent commission rates and other recruitment channels. Agents needed incentivising to work with Cranfield's unique set up and product portfolio in a highly competitive market. Conversion rates varied from region to region. In terms of alternative recruitment channels, Cranfield was increasing engagement through its alumni network and FBAM was considering introducing an award to their Alumni for bringing students in.

6.3 *Remuneration Committee*

The Committee had met twice since the last meeting of Council. Whilst much of the information remained confidential to the Committee, it was reported that the Committee took an inclusive view about the cost-of-living review. University Executive members were not taking bonuses again this year. The Committee wished to recognise the huge amount of work that had gone into the Executive P&DR annual review.

7. **Emeritus Professorship – Joe Nellis [2025-10-29-07]**

Resolved: Council approved the conferral of the title Emeritus Professor upon Joe Nellis with effect from 1 January 2026.

8. Any other business

- 8.1 On confidentiality, new members were invited to seek clarification from the CEVC, University Secretary or Chair of Council if uncertain on any matter.
- 8.2 On the occasion of his final meeting, the University Secretary proposed a vote of thanks on behalf of the University Executive and Council members to Iain Ferguson, Pro-Chancellor and Chair of Council, for his contributions to the University over many years.

Julie Morris
Governance Officer
4 November 2025

Council – Action List

Meeting date	Action	Comment	Lead
2025-10-29	Council requested full transparency of the HSW areas that required specialist training modules, the number of staff required to complete those modules, completion rates, and gap analysis		LT
2025-10-29	Council offered to facilitate communication between Cranfield and the investment minister.		KH/PZ
2025-10-29	Council offered to advise on MoD, government and investment opportunities within the Oxford - Cambridge corridor.		KH/PW
2025-10-29	Council asked that future updates include more material on impact on student experience and other unintended consequences.		RC
2025-10-29	Council asked for terms of reference for CEWG.		SGD
2025-10-29	Council offered support on developing commercial KPIs / measures of success.		RC/CD