

**UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK
ASSEMBLY**

PUBLIC MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 24 MAY 2024 VIA MS TEAMS

Present	Professor Stuart Croft	Vice-Chancellor (Chair)
	Dr Chris Twine	Secretary to Council (Secretary)
	Dr Gavin Schwartz-Leeper	Associate Professor, Dean of Students Office and School for Cross-Faculty Studies (Proposer of Motion 1)
	Yue Zhou	Web and Communications Coordinator, Lifelong Learning (Seconder of Motion 1)
	Professor Nicola Pratt	Professor, Politics and International Studies (Proposer of Motion 2)
	Dr Myka Tucker-Abramson	Associate Professor, English and Comparative Literary Studies (Seconder of Motion 2)
	Sophie Black	Assistant Registrar (Governance) (Technology Assistant)
	Angela Gibson	Administrative Officer (Governance) (Technology Assistant)
	Katharine Gray	Head of Governance Services
	Phil Griffiths	Administrative Officer (Governance) (Technology Assistant)
	Emma Jeavons	Assistant Registrar (Governance) (Minute-taker)
	Members of the Assembly (137 members present, inclusive of those above)	
Ref	Item	
008	<p>Welcome and Introductory Remarks</p> <p>The Chair welcomed members of the Assembly, declared the meeting open and reported that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The membership of the Assembly included all staff employed on level 1-9 terms and conditions from the date of their employment. • The meeting was quorate. • The meeting was first announced on Insite on 20 May 2024. The Motion and associated documents were published online on the same date. <p>The Secretary outlined the voting procedure, noting that an online poll would be used to vote on the Motions, with contingency measures in place should individuals encounter any issues. Verification of the vote count would take place after the Assembly meeting and the final outcome would be recorded in the minutes.</p>	
009	<p>Declarations of Interest</p> <p>Yue Zhou – UNISON.</p>	
010	<p>Chair's Business</p> <p>There were no items of Chair's business.</p>	
011	<p>Minutes of the meeting of the Assembly held on 28 February 2024</p> <p>DECISION: The minutes of the meeting of the Assembly held on 28 February 2024 (011-A240524) were approved.</p>	
012	<p>Matters arising from the meeting of the Assembly held on 28 February 2024</p> <p>There were no matters arising.</p>	
013	<p>Standing Orders of the Assembly</p> <p>The Secretary reported that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Assembly was not a decision-making body of the University. It could make recommendations to Council and Senate. • As the meeting was taking place on Microsoft Teams there were a number of the procedural elements under the current Standing Orders that did not apply. • That the Standing Orders were last approved by the Assembly on 15 December 2020. 	

Items for Discussion

014 **Motion to the Assembly: On links with organisations supporting Israel's military actions in occupied Palestinian territory**

Dr Gavin Schwartz-Leeper and Yue Zhou presented Motion 1:

"The Assembly notes that the University of Warwick has a number of relationships with companies supporting Israel's military actions in the Gaza Strip and its continued military occupation of Palestinian territory.

The Assembly also notes that the International Court of Justice ruled in January that it is plausible that Israel's actions in the Gaza Strip could amount to genocide against the Palestinian people, whilst a UN expert has found "reasonable grounds to believe that the threshold indicating the commission of the crime of genocide...has been met."¹ Consequently, the University of Warwick has been warned that it may face legal action as a result of these ties.²

More broadly, international human rights groups have described Israel's system of governance over the Palestinian people as 'apartheid'; the Assembly voted in 1977 to divest from companies linked to the South African apartheid state.³

The Assembly further notes that staff and students at Warwick have raised concerns with University leadership about Warwick's potential complicity with Israel's actions in the Gaza Strip (following on from motions passed by the Students' Union, UCU, and UNISON). More recently, students have established an encampment on campus in order to further raise their concerns.

The Assembly believes that the University is acting in violation of its values by continuing to maintain institutional connections with arms companies and organisations facilitating or engaging in war crimes, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing and/or genocide.

The Assembly resolves to call on the University to:

1. immediately disclose to all staff and students all of its external relationships and investments through an accessible database in order that there is full transparency;

2. commit to ending all links with and investments in organisations involved in manufacturing weapons;

3. immediately form a working group to:

a. investigate all of the University's investments and partnerships to identify any that may be complicit with war crimes, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing and genocide;

b. develop and/or amend the legal, policy, and other governance mechanisms of the University to ensure that University investments, procurement, research, and research and educational partnerships do not risk being complicit with war crimes, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing and genocide;

4. Ensure that the working group is comprised of members of the Senate, Council, Assembly, Students' Union, UCU and Unison, and representatives of Warwick Stands With Palestine encampment;

5. Ensure that the working group is supported by a chair elected from the members of the working group;

6. Ensure that the membership of the working group be comprised of individuals with diverse characteristics;

7. Allocate financial resources to contribute to the rebuilding of the higher education sector in the Gaza Strip, including but not limited to providing scholarships to students in Gaza to complete their degrees, establishing collaborative initiatives such as twinnings, exchanges, joint projects, academic fellowships and partnerships with Palestinian universities that contribute positively to the educational sector in the Gaza Strip;

8. immediately release a public statement that:

¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/01/gaza-icj-ruling-offers-hope-protection-civilians-enduring-Apocalyptic>;
<https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/03/1147976>

² <https://www.icjpalastine.com/2024/05/01/82-british-universities-alerted-of-potential-criminal-complicity-over-israeli-investments/>

³ See: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2022/02/israels-system-of-apartheid/>; Assembly minutes 1-77/8.

- a. Commits to ending links with and investments in organisations involved in manufacturing weapons;
- b. Announces the formation of the above working group and its purpose;
- c. Condemns the destruction of the higher education sector in the Gaza Strip, including the killing of academics, researchers and students, and calls for an immediate and permanent ceasefire;
- d. Calls on the UK government to push for an immediate permanent ceasefire; to end its military support for the Israeli state; to advocate for the prosecution of alleged Israeli war crimes in line with international law; and to lobby the government to provide protection to scholars in Gaza by renewing the funding for the Researchers at Risk scheme and opening it to Palestinian academics immediately and without delay, in line with Early Day Motion 505.⁴ (Paper O14-A240524)

Key points raised by Dr Gavin Schwartz-Leeper were as follows:

- Pressure was required from all sectors, including HE, to effect change.
- University policies did not go far enough to address institutional relationships with the companies or organisations in question.
- The University Assembly had already, in 1977, voted to divest as a response to apartheid in South Africa.

Comments and responses were invited, summarised as follows:

- It was important to be mindful of the language used in discussions, particularly in relation to war crimes and genocide. Members discussed whether military action could be classified as war crimes and it was noted that the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) had issued a request for arrest warrants in relation to crimes against humanity and war crimes.
- The focus of the discussion should be on the University's role in arms production rather than the British Government's role or views on arms manufacturing or war in general.
- Student and staff support of the motion could be seen reflected in their support of similar, recent motions by the University and College Union (UCU) and UNISON and a Students' Union all student vote.
- The Council's statement of 22 May 2024, including that "a meeting has taken place with academic advocates for Palestine to open the way for the University to take part in the international efforts for Higher Education in Gaza. This includes helping a University in the West Bank to provide education for displaced students" was welcomed, but should go further.

A vote was then taken on Motion 1, with the results outlined in the table below:

	Vote Count		
	Electronic Vote	Contingency Measure (vote submitted directly to Secretary to Council)	Total
Motion 1			
Yes	81	9	90
No	7	0	7
Abstain	5	0	5
Total vote count =			102
Members present at time of vote =			115

⁴ <https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/62002/palestinians-and-the-researchers-at-risk-scheme>

Motion to the Assembly: On relationships with universities

Professor Nicola Pratt and Myka Tucker-Abramson presented Motion 2:

“This Assembly notes that senior management at a number of universities globally have carried out draconian policies to silence and punish staff and students speaking out, expressing concern and/or opposing Israel’s military actions in the the Gaza Strip and their government’s support for them, including overwhelmingly peaceful student protests. In some cases, students and/or staff have been physically assaulted and/or arrested by police. The Assembly further notes that the University has relationships - including student exchanges - with a number of these institutions.

This Assembly condemns police violence against and university punishment of staff and students for exercising democratic rights to protest.

The Assembly believes that the University of Warwick has legal and moral obligations to protect the rights and safety of its students and staff and, therefore, resolves to suspend links with any institution that uses violence, intimidation or disciplinary measures to silence, shut down, or infringe upon the rights of staff or students to lawfully protest and express opposition to Israel’s military actions in the occupied Palestinian territories and/or protest their own government’s policy towards Israel’s military actions;

This Assembly further resolves to call on the University to commit publicly to not using the police or campus security to forcibly suppress lawful protests on campus and to not use disciplinary processes to punish those who have engaged in lawful protest nor to undertake any other actions that may infringe upon the rights of staff and students to exercise academic freedom and freedom of expression in contesting the actions of the Israeli government or any other government.” (Paper 015-A240524)

Key points raised by Professor Nicola Pratt were as follows:

- The scenes in the media of staff and student protests and arrests, at universities in the US and Europe, had been distressing.
- UK universities had a legal duty to protect academic freedom and freedom of speech.
- UK universities had a duty of care to students and staff, including when sending them on exchange programmes to other institutions.

Comments and responses were invited, summarised as follows:

- The circumstances and grounds leading to the arrests of protestors at US universities was discussed.
- There was concern that the right to protest had been challenged at recent demonstrations on university campuses worldwide and that this may become more prevalent in the UK.
- The protestors’ encampment had generated a sense of solidarity amongst participating staff and students.

A vote was then taken on Motion 2, with the results outlined in the table below:

	Vote Count		
	Electronic Vote	Contingency Measure (vote submitted directly to Secretary to Council)	Total
Motion 2			
Yes	83	8	91
No	10	0	10
Abstain	9	0	9
Total vote count =			110
Members present at time of vote =			121

Meeting Closed 09:49