

UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK
SOCIAL INCLUSION STRATEGY COMMITTEE

PUBLIC MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD Thursday 14 May 2026 (Online)

Present	Rachel Sandby Thomas		Chair
	Kulbir Shergill		Director of Social Inclusion
	Kirstie Haywood		Professor, WMS
	James Hayton		Chair of Academic Faculty
	Adam Child		Academic Registrar
	Rebecca Freeman		Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education)
	Rachel Moseley		Chair of Academic Faculty
	Ros Roke		Programme Director Warwick Transformation
	Emma Cann		Secretary
	Lorraine Martin		Assistant Secretary
Attending	Nick Wright		Senior Legal Counsel

Please note: some items are noted as “Exempt information not included” as they contain information that would be withheld and released to the public because an exemption under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 applies.

Ref	Item
025	Apologies for absence Andy Lockett Kerry Kirwan Gavin Perkins Mike Ward Ollie Chapman The Chair expressed thanks to members for accommodating diary changes at short notice to support charring arrangements.
026	Declarations of interest None declared.
027	Minutes of meeting held on 15 January 2026 The minutes of the previous meeting held on 15 January 2026 (027-SISC14052026) were approved as a true and accurate reflection.
028	Matters arising from meeting held on 15 January 2026 (a) Update on Actions (028-SISC14052026) All actions discussed had been updated on the action log sheet. Outstanding Actions Update The Committee reviewed the outstanding actions previously assigned to Head of People Partnering Geraldine Mills, noting that they had now left the University.

	019 Action, Chief People Officer – A request was made to confirm with the Chief People Officer who will own Action 019 regarding grievance data. 021 Action Log Update – The Committee noted completion of one of the outstanding actions relating to Unitemps, and a supporting document was shared with members.
Chair's Update & Governance	
029	Chair's Business and Actions See item 028 for updates.
030	Membership The Chief People Officer and Director of Communications - Corporate Brand were welcomed to the meeting. Members discussed the level of absence and expressed concern regarding the lack of representation, particularly at Deputy Vice-Provost/ Dean level. The Committee agreed it was important that the group did not become solely Professional Services-focused. Faculty representation was essential, and appropriate faculty representatives should attend future meetings. DECISION: Academic leads to nominate a deputy leader (COO or Departmental HOD) if they are unable to attend.
Other	
031	Sussex OFS Judgement The Committee received an update from Senior Legal Counsel following the High Court Judgement regarding University of Sussex v OfS. The PowerPoint outlining details of the case has been shared with the committee. Key Points ➤ The case centred on a complaint concerning potential breaches of academic freedom and freedom of speech relating to the University of Sussex's Trans and Non-Binary Policy. ➤ The OfS had issued a £585,000 fine (March 2026) due to breach of conditions E1 and E2. ➤ Sussex had outlined 11 points in their appeal, of which they won 7. ➤ The main implications for the OfS were: ○ OfS was found to be biased in its approach. ○ The High Court found the Trans code was not a governing document. ○ Policy changes introduced at Sussex (2023–2024), including disciplinary and safeguarding frameworks and removal of the positive representation statement addressed the potential chilling effect of the Code but were not considered by the OfS during its investigation. Key takeaways from the case informing Warwick's approach were: ➤ OfS oversight was limited to Governance documents, which had a limited definition. ➤ Universities could restrict free speech if it was a proportionate means to achieving a legitimate aim. ➤ OfS should work with universities to remedy any breaches.

- OfS needed to target cases only where action was needed.
- The role of OfS was to support compliance not punish or target.
- The University would need to be aware of the risk of a “chilling effect” arising from unclear or overly restrictive policy wording nevertheless, other policies would need to take into account.

Discussion

Members discussed the implications for the University, including:

- Any policy would need to be read in conjunction with other relevant policies e.g. Freedom of Speech.
- Safeguarding statements re: Freedom of Speech were important components of policies.
- The University’s Dignity Principles Policy offered important protection to staff and students and was compliant with Free Speech.
- The three-step approach to protecting Freedom of Speech remained correct.

Conclusion

The Committee noted that the judgement provided reassurance that dignity and safeguarding policies could coexist with freedom of speech requirements, when appropriately framed.

Members were encouraged to review the full judgement and supporting materials.

Acknowledgement

Members thanked Senior Legal Counsel for the briefing.

ACTIONS

- 1) Review Trans Inclusion Code of Practice in light of High Court Judgement and EHRC guidance when published.
- 2) Review Dignity Principles webpage and ensure Freedom of Speech policy was signposted.

032 Pay Gap - Faculty Gender and Ethnicity Plans and Targets

The Committee received a report from Director of Social Inclusion discussing the current Female and BAME institutional KPIs.

[Exempt information not included].

The suggested positive actions to support the KPIs, which require the right culture, inclusive leadership, and consistency in practice, had been discussed with Faculty COOs prior to sharing at SISC and included:

- Leadership and development programmes (e.g. Accelerate).
- Mentoring and targeted support for individuals.
- Reviewing fixed-term roles and progression opportunities.
- Exploring flexible models such as job shares.
- Strengthening visibility of opportunities (e.g. internal job boards).

	Key points raised due the discussion included The Committee discussed the value of KPIs and the appropriate terminology. It agreed that KPIs were useful to measure progress and drive towards change but were not intended to be targets or quotas. Grades FA6/7 represented a critical pipeline for progression to senior roles. Supporting colleagues at this level would be key to addressing long-term pay gap issues. This was due to academic talent leaving the institution at the end of fixed term Grade 6 contracts and budgetary constraints impacting the opportunity to increase the Grade 7 population. Other notable points include: ➤ The importance of using KPIs to track progress while recognising sensitivities at departmental level. ➤ Evidence that progression rates to senior academic roles differed by gender, contributing to the pay gap. ➤ The need for more detailed data on promotion rates, pipeline progression, and career stages. ➤ Recognition that the University performed relatively well on equal pay, but structural issues impacted representation at senior levels. ➤ The importance of understanding barriers to progression, including contract types, pipeline retention, and access to opportunities. ➤ Lack of exit data was impacting the ability to ensure actions were targeted and relevant. ➤ Lack of flexibility in funding models restricted the ability to offer job share or part-time contracts. ➤ The impact of the recent VLS was still unknown. [Exempt information not included]. ➤ The Committee acknowledged the progress in reducing the gender pay and increasing senior representation since KPIS were introduced. Conclusion and Decision It was agreed to present the work to UEB for further discussion, ensuring the ambitions and associated risks were highlighted. [Exempt information not included] Acknowledgement Members welcomed the data-led approach and emphasised the importance of maintaining momentum in addressing the pay gap. ACTIONS: 1) Submit paper to UEB for further discussion and approval 2) Data Analysis: Provide additional data on promotion rates, pipeline trends, and departmental insights at future SISC meeting. 3) Provide analysis of Voluntary Leaver Scheme (VLS) and exit interview data to better understand attrition. (Owner: Chief People Officer)
033	Dignity Principals Policy

	The Committee received an update on the Dignity Principles Policy. It was noted that the policy had initially been delayed pending further guidance from the EHRC on the definition of sex; however, it had now been agreed to proceed whilst final guidance was awaited. Key Updates ➤ Revisions to some wordings had been made to mitigate any potential “chilling effect” on freedom of speech (e.g. “could” instead of “should”) ➤ References to hate crime had been updated to align with current legal definitions. ➤ The policy now included strengthened references to freedom of speech, recognising its central importance within the Equality Act. ➤ The policy sat alongside wider work on bullying and organisational culture. Engagement and Development Members noted that a cross-University group, convened by the Registrar, had supported discussion and alignment of the University’s approach to preventing bullying and harassment. Feedback from this group was informing the development of resources and actions to help staff understand the policy in practice. Discussion Members welcomed the strengthened focus on legal compliance. It was suggested that wording in section 5.1 be strengthened to clearly state that related guidance (including on freedom of speech) should be read alongside the policy, rather than simply referenced. It was emphasised that nothing within the policy should be interpreted as contravening freedom of speech obligations. DECISION: The Committee approved the policy for submission to Policy Oversight Group, subject to amendment of the wording in section 5.1 to strengthen Freedom of Speech.
034	Athena Swan Awards The Committee was invited to discuss the University’s approach to Institutional Athena Swan (IAS), noting that the question of whether submissions were required was being raised increasingly by departments. <i>[Exempt information not included]</i> Conclusion The Committee acknowledged the continued need to invest in gender equity and retain departmental-level action plans however, membership to Athena Swan was a strategic issue requiring further consideration by UEB. ACTION: Present a paper to UEB <i>[Exempt information not included]</i>
035	Forum update Social Inclusion Forum Chair presented the Social Inclusion Forum’s progress to date. The Forum had held two formal meetings with approximately 60 members in attendance. A member poll was used to gather feedback on key areas of interest, of which gender pay gap was identified. The Term 2 meeting comprised a gender pay gap presentation and follow-up discussions conducted via a series of listening sessions enabling members to raise concerns. Listening Session Key Themes The following key areas of focus were identified during the listening sessions: • Career progression • Culture and behaviours • Workload pressures and their impact on development and progression

	Data and disclosures As a result of feedback, the Chief People Officer would be invited to a future Forum meeting to share the work being delivered by the People Team; it was hoped this would help address some concerns. An upcoming in-person Forum event would also enable members to share best practice. The Forum chairs would continue to work with the Social Inclusion and People team to support inclusion work. ACTION: Forum update to be placed at the top of the agenda for the next meeting to ensure sufficient time is allocated for a full update and discussion.
036	Collaboration Group Update Due to time constraints, this item was not discussed.
Items below this line are for receipt and/or approval, without discussion Subsidiary and Sub-Committee Reports	
037	Pathways report The Committee noted the report (037-SISC14052026).
038	Social Inclusion Council Report The Committee noted the report (038-SISC141026, Confidential), as shared with Council.
039	Any other business There was no other business to report.
Next meeting: 15 October 2026	