

# Council

24/01 A meeting of the Council was held on Tuesday 23 January 2024 at 2.00 pm in Room 201, Carrington Building, Whiteknights.

Present:           The President                   (in the Chair)  
                  The Vice Presidents       (Mr K. Corrigan and Mrs K. Owen)  
                  The Vice-Chancellor  
                  The Deputy Vice-Chancellor  
                  The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Dr C. Baylon)  
                  The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Professor D. Zaum)

Mr S. Alexander	Ms S. Maple
Mr S. Ali	Mr A. McCallum
Professor E. Beleska-Spasova	Mr P. Milhofer
Mrs S. Butler	Mrs S. Plank
Mrs P. Egan	Mr N. Richards
Professor R. Frazier	Dr C. Shaw
Professor J. Gibbins	Professor K. Strohfeldt
Mr E. Gregory	Dr J. Young
Mr J. Jack	

In attendance:

The Chief Strategy Officer and University Secretary  
The Director of Finance  
The Director of Quality Support and Development  
Research Deans (for Minute 24/04 only):  
    Professor R. Gilchrist (Heritage and Creativity)  
    Professor T. Oliver (Environment)  
    Professor C. Wagstaff (Agriculture, Food and Health)

Apologies had been received from Professor E. McCrum and Ms S. Jordan.

## 24/02 President's opening remarks

The President:

- congratulated the Vice-Chancellor on being awarded a CBE in the New Years' Honours
- congratulated Dr Young on recently receiving her CBE from the King;
- advised that she, together with the Vice-Presidents, would shortly engage with Council members in the annual light touch appraisal, which was designed to gather feedback and ensure that members, individually and collectively, were able to contribute optimally to Council's work;

- noted that a number of Council members had asked for an opportunity to consider some areas of business in greater depth, and that, in consequence, it was proposed that the March meeting be extended;
- expressed her delight to be attending, along with other Council members, the Chancellor's Awards celebration, which recognised the achievements of the University's highest performing students;
- encouraged members to participate in the meeting of Court in March, which provided valuable opportunities for networking and advocacy for the University.

#### 24/03 Disclosure of Interests (Item 2)

The Committee received and noted a paper from the University Secretary in regard to Disclosure of Interests.

### **Presentations**

#### 24/04 Partnerships (Item 3)

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor and the Research Deans gave a presentation on partnerships.

Following a brief introduction from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, the Research Deans outlined the purpose, progress and impact of four strategic partnerships:

##### ***Advancing the Frontiers of Earth System Prediction***

Professor Tom Oliver, on behalf of Professor Rowan Sutton, joint Research Deans (Environment)

Advancing the Frontiers of Earth System Prediction (APESP) was a partnership between the University, the European Centre for Medium-range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF), the UK Met Office, and the National Centre for Atmospheric Science, launched in February 2023 and with £6m funding committed to date. Its purpose was to address long-term, high-risk, high-reward research challenges in ECMWF's future modelling and forecasting work. By improving early warning of hazards and developing applications for research, it would have a global impact, including saving lives and delivering huge financial benefits. Professor Oliver outlined the posts and income generated to date, indicated future opportunities, and spoke of some challenges, including developing effective ways of working across organisations with different remits and cultures.

##### ***British Museum***

Professor Roberta Gilchrist, Research Dean (Heritage and Creativity)

The University had been working with the British Museum (BM) since 2018, following a successful competitive bid to provide a site for the BM's relocated Archaeological Research Collection (ARC). While originally a property transaction, the relationship had developed into a richer collaboration, embracing teaching, research, staff exchange, placements, local schools outreach and public engagement. The ARC would formally open in autumn 2024. The collaboration included, from the University, colleagues in Archaeology, Classics, History, Education and the University Museums, and relied on a small core of colleagues working on this alongside their other responsibilities. It did not have any dedicated posts and did not involve any additional salary costs. It had an 80% success rate in its funding applications to UKRI, AHRC and the British Academy. Professor Gilchrist outlined the range of activities undertaken, including research workshops, student placements, object loans to the

University's Ure Museum and the co-curation of the BM Stonehenge exhibition and catalogue. [redacted, section 43].

### **Natural History Museum**

Professor Tom Oliver, Research Dean (Environment)

The University and the Natural History Museum (NHM) had agreed to develop a wide-ranging and long-term research collaboration, accompanied by a move of 28m of specimens to a bespoke collections, science and digitisation facility based at TVSP, with significant government investment. The centre would be completed in 2027 and would receive collections in 2028-31. The initiative followed from Sir Paul Nurse's Independent Review of the UK's Research, Development and Innovation Organisational Landscape, and, working across a range of topics, including archaeology, data science and AI, conservation, paleoecology and sustainability, would push the boundaries of knowledge to address global environmental challenges. [redacted, section 43].

### **Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust**

Professor Carol Wagstaff, Research Dean (Agriculture, Food and Health)

The University had been working in partnership with Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust (RBFT) for a number of years, and the current Health Innovation Partnership activity (2021-26) built on the work of the Joint Academic Board (2018-21). Strategic objectives of the partnership focussed on developing a portfolio of educational activities, driving the development of a vibrant research culture, creating an engaged community, and achieving ambitions for a medical school and University Hospital Status. The work extended beyond the academic sphere and included collaboration between support services. Professor Wagstaff spoke of:

- the Clinical Skills Simulation Training Suite, part-funded by the OfS, which emulated an RFBT ward and offered innovative 3D anatomy visualisation and virtual dissection tools;
- the Laboratory Efficiency Assessment Framework, which improved the carbon footprint of laboratories;
- the University Department of Excellence status, which recognised clinical, educational and research excellence in hospital departments;
- the appointment of a Royal Society Entrepreneur in Residence to support commercialisation of the University's collaborative outputs with the NHS;
- [redacted, section 43].
- success in attracting major research grants for projects on clinical diagnostics, blood testing and personalised analytics, machine learning in prediction of inflammatory arthritis, and innovative treatments for osteoarthritis.

She discussed some of the lessons learned, including the importance of embedding a research culture across all professions, the value of roadmaps in supporting effective collaboration, shared skills development, and the need for effective infrastructure. [redacted, section 43].

In response to questions, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Research Deans explained that partnerships with major regional, national and international bodies enhanced the University's profile, attracted and leveraged research funding, and recruited some of the most promising researchers in the relevant fields, thereby generating a positive cycle for excellence and growth. Through the AFESP partnership, the University would host the largest concentration of climate scientists in Europe. Strategic partnerships drew substantial

external (including government) investment to the University and secured a dynamic future and enduring legacy.

The President thanked the Research Deans for their presentations and for the work of colleagues in developing and sustaining these and other strategic partnerships. She spoke of the impressive range and magnitude of the University's partnerships, and noted that Council would follow their progress with keen interest.

Given the limited opportunity for discussion, Council members were invited to relay any further questions through the Chief Strategy Officer and University Secretary.

#### 24/05 Update on Reading Students' Union (RSU) priorities (Item 4)

Mr Gregory, RSU President, gave a presentation updating Council on progress with RSU's four priorities for the year: Inclusivity and belonging; Cost of living; Safety; and Housing.

Mr Gregory reported *inter alia* that:

##### *Inclusivity and belonging*

- the legacy of the pandemic continued to affect students' sociability and willingness to engage with events and societies. While, in the period immediately following pandemic restrictions, there had been a resurgence in social activity, this had fallen away and attendance at many events was very disappointing;
- RSU and the University were collaborating on a campaign to encourage students to take a pledge against hate speech;

##### *Cost of living*

- RSU had served over 4k 'savers' menu' meals, was continuing to provide free tea and coffee in the RSU building, and was offering grants from an Academic Resource Fund to support students with their programme costs;

##### *Safety*

- RSU had ensured that their bar staff had taken bystander training so they were able to support students who were, or at risk of being, being harassed;
- A planned security review had been delayed due to staffing changes in the RSU professional team;

##### *Housing*

- RSU was in the process of putting in place a guarantor scheme, which would enable international students and others without a financial guarantor to access the private rental market.

In response to questions, Mr Gregory explained that, following the appointment of a new Communications Director, RSU was refreshing its communications strategy, which might include greater reliance on physical resources, such as posters and flyers. He noted that, for many students, the pandemic had coincided with a crucial stage in their social development, and he suggested that this may now be inhibiting their sociability and making them risk-averse. He spoke about social media and noted that students seemed less concerned than older generations about issues of privacy and the longevity of material on the web.

#### 24/06 A presentation from the Professional Services representative, Mr John Jack, on a topic of his choosing: the new Directorate structure (Item 5)

Mr Jack gave a presentation on the new Directorate structure.

Mr Jack explained that the new Directorate structure would formally be effective from the 2024/25 academic year, but the Heads of Directorate were already working together and with their respective professional services to identify priorities, understand challenges, and develop synergies both across professional services and between services and Schools. He outlined how professional services were working collaboratively across Function and Directorate boundaries to support the achievement of the four pillars of the University Strategy. He explained that the Heads of Directorate had collective ownership of professional services savings targets and were leading work to streamline services and develop new ways of working. Professional services were committed to effective, efficient, economical and timely delivery of services, to enable excellence and support the University's contribution to a better world.

In response to questions, Mr Jack indicated that colleagues in professional services had broadly welcomed the new structure and were currently working through the implications of the changes and the opportunities they presented. While some had questions and concerns, as was natural, there was a shared sense that this change was being managed better than some previous structural change projects related to professional services. The Chief Strategy Officer and University Secretary reported that the Heads of Directorate were meeting every fortnight, were pleased with their progress in planning for 2024/25, and were confident that next year's savings targets would be met. They recognised the challenge of the savings targets in 2025/26, but the University was piloting a new approach to business process reviews, which was designed to support the delivery of efficiencies and cash savings across operational areas.

The Council thanked Mr Jack for his helpful presentation and expressed its appreciation of the work being done by professional services.

## **Items for approval**

### **24/07 Report of Scrutiny and Finance Committee (Item 6)**

The Council received the Report of a meeting of the Scrutiny and Finance Committee, held on 8 January 2024.

Mr Corrigan, as the Committee's Chair, outlined its consideration of student growth and risk, noting the actions being taken to drive growth in student numbers and to mitigate the upside risks (pressure on staff, the estate and infrastructure) and downside risks (financial impacts). [redacted, section 43].

The Council thanked the Director of Finance for the financial data dashboard, which presented concise and clear financial information and provided a consistent basis on which to track the University's financial performance. Council noted that the Q1 report stated that the University was forecasting to stay within the -£31m deficit budget envelope Council had approved for 2023/24.

In response to questions on the presentation of financial information to Council, the Director of Finance agreed to review whether financial planning relied too heavily on a 'best case' scenario, and whether a 'mid-case' scenario, with provisions for better and worse performance, might be more realistic and useful. The Vice-Chancellor and the Director of Finance acknowledged Council's desire for a simple, high-level model to aid its understanding of the dynamics of the University's finances and the different financial impacts of the University's core activities. It would, however, be challenging to develop such

a model, given the complex interdependencies of the University's different activities and their financial implications; a simplified model risked being misleading. The Director of Finance committed to bring a summary model of our activities to a future Scrutiny and Finance Committee to explain our mix of income streams, their financial margins and the extent of cross subsidy.

In response to further questions, the Vice-Chancellor:

- [redacted, section 34].
- noted that the UK's demographics offered good prospects for student growth to 2030 but indicated a decline in 18 year olds thereafter. He explained that, in order to address the short-term position, the University was extending the life of the temporary Chancellor's building which comprised teaching rooms and staff offices, and would not exclude renting additional teaching space for a limited time. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Planning and Resource) referred to other measures, related to the teaching day, which might need to be considered.
- explained that the figure of [redacted, section 43] to be returned from the Investment Fund for investment in the University's core activities was not fixed and would be varied in the light of changing circumstances. [redacted, section 43]. The University was confident that the value of the Investment Fund would grow, given the range of initiatives currently in train, and had an obligation, as a charity, to use its resources to achieve its charitable objectives. This [redacted, section 43] investment gave the University a strategic competitive advantage at a time when many other universities were not able to fund investment in future success;
- spoke of the growth of 'commuter students' and the University's work to understand their circumstances and support their needs. He explained that, due to their social and educational profile, relatively few students in the locality came to the University, but that an increasing number commuted from further afield, including the Slough area and outer London, which was facilitated by the Elizabeth Line.

**Council, acting as Trustee of the Greenlands Trust, resolved:**

"That delegated authority of the Greenlands Trust Committee be defined as follows:

- That Council, acting as Trustee, delegates to the Trust Committee responsibility for approving the allocation of small grants to the Business School, in line with the Trust's objective to support management education, from the funds it has specifically set aside for this purpose, [redacted, section 43].
- That Council approval continues to be required for any proposals emerging from the Committee in relation to the non-current assets of the Trust or for the use of assets other than those set out above."

**Council resolved:**

"That the Report of the Scrutiny and Finance Committee, held on 8 January 2024, now submitted be received."

**24/08 Report of Investments and Development Committee (Item 7)**

The Council received the Report of a meeting of the Investments and Development Committee, held on 23 January 2024.

Mr Corrigan, as the Committee's Chair, explained that the amendments to the Terms of Reference and membership formalised the Committee's direct reporting line to Council,

included a student representative in its membership, and recognised the role of the Commercial Advisory Group in relation to the Committee.

In response to a question, Mr Corrigan suggested that the Committee's responsibility to set targets for the University's investment managers and to assess their performance against target was sufficiently captured in the reference to monitoring in Term of Reference 4.

**Resolved:**

1. "That draft revised Terms of Reference and membership of the Committee, now submitted, be approved;
2. "That the Report of the Investments and Development Committee, held on 27 November 2023, now submitted, be received."

24/09 Any other business: Membership of the NIRD Trust Committee (Item 14)

*Dr Young recused herself from the discussion of this item and withdrew from the meeting.*

The Committee received a draft amendment to the membership of the NIRD Trust Committee.

The Chief Strategy Officer and University Secretary explained that the amendments recognised the changing nature of the Committee's work and implemented proposals which had previously been agreed by Council.

In response to questions, the Vice-Chancellor explained that, while the Council's principal committees had a majority of lay members, this was not, nor had been, a convention in respect of trust committees.

**Resolved:**

"That the draft membership of the NIRD Trust Committee, now submitted, be approved."

*Dr Young returned to the meeting.*

**Items for report**

24/10 Report of the Vice-Chancellor (Item 8)

The Council received the Report of the Vice-Chancellor.

The Vice-Chancellor drew attention to the University's achievement of first place ranking in the 2023 People and Planet University League table. People and Planet assessed 151 institutions across 14 criteria, and the University had achieved full marks against four criteria.

In response to questions, the Vice-Chancellor explained that the University had launched the 2024 'Just imagine if...' competition, which offered a research grant of up to £100,000 to develop ideas which would contribute to the achievement of one or more of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The 'Just imagine if...' awards had been founded by Paul

Lindley, the University's Chancellor, had previously been hosted by other universities, and were funded largely through charitable donations.

In response to a further question, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Planning and Resource) (Professor Zaum) explained that the UCAS deadline for applications was 31 January 2024, which was later than in previous years. Due to this and to 40% of the University's applications being received in the ten days before the deadline, it was not possible to have a clear sense of the final number of applications or to make definitive comparisons with previous years or with competitors. [Redacted, section 43]. Having noted press reports that one Russell Group university was offering a lower entry tariff for international students than for Home students, he confirmed that the University would maintain parity in the tariff for Home and International students and referred to the reputational risks in doing otherwise. The University had increased its tariff for some programmes, while in others they had been reduced to reflect practice.

**Resolved:**

"That the Report of the Vice-Chancellor, now submitted, be received."

24/11 Suggested items for future Council meetings (Item 9)

The Council received an update on topics for discussion at future Council meetings.

The Council noted that the March meeting would include extended consideration of the University's international strategy and a presentation from the RSU President and Education Officer on 'what it's like to be a student in 2024', which would include some reflection on the cost of living, the need for paid work, and its implications for patterns of study.

The Council noted a suggestion that Council, in the near future, consider the staff experience and their remuneration, and asked that an update on progress with the Access and Participation Plan be provided in due course.

The President invited members to contact her or the Chief Strategy Officer and University Secretary if they wished to suggest further topics.

**Resolved:**

"That a paper on suggested topics for discussion by Council, now submitted, be received."

**Items for note**

23/12 Minutes (23/86-23/108) of the meeting held on 22 November 2023 (Item 10)

Minutes (23/86-23/108) of the meeting of the Council held on 22 November 2023 were confirmed.

24/13 Matter arising on Minutes of meeting on 3 July 2023 (Item 11)

There were no matters arising.

24/14 Decisions taken by the President on behalf of the Council (Item 12)



The Council noted that the President had approved, on behalf of Council, amendments to Ordinances A9 and B3 to add the Director of Finance as a non-academic Officer of the University.

24/15 Documents sealed and to be sealed (Item 13)

The Council received a list of documents sealed and to be sealed.

**Resolved:**

"That the Council approve the action taken by the Officers and Members in affixing the University Seal to documents sealed since the last Ordinary Meeting of the Council and authorise the Seal of the University to be affixed to the documents to be sealed as now reported."

24/16 Dates of meetings of the Council for the Session 2023/24 (Item 15)

The Council agreed that its March meeting be extended to allow fuller consideration of key items of business. The schedule of further meetings of the Council in the Session 2023/24 was therefore as follows:

Monday 11 March 2024, 10.00 am-5.00 pm

Monday 1 July 2024, 12 noon-5.00 pm.

24/17 Reflections on the meeting (Item 16)

Members reflected in small groups on the business and the nature of the discussions at the meeting.