Council

14/18  A meeting of the Council was held in Room G06/G07, LO22, London Road on Monday 24 March 2014 at 2pm.

The President
The Vice-Presidents (Mr R Dwyer, Ms S M Woodman)
The Vice-Chancellor
The Deputy Vice-Chancellor
The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Professor G Brooks)
The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Professor S J Mithen)
The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Professor C M Williams)

Ms K Ashford
Dr B Cosh
Professor R H Ellis
Dame Moira Gibb
Mr S Hawker
Mr M Kelleher
Professor G Marston
Professor I Mueller-Harvey
Dr P R Preston
Mr S C C Pryce
Mr S P Sherman
Mr I P Smith
Sir John Sunderland
The University Secretary

In attendance:

The Chief Operating Officer
The Head of University Administration
The Director of Finance

By invitation:

Mrs J Rowe, Employment Solicitor

Apologies were received from Mr Bartlam, Professor Board, Ms Davies, Mrs Edwards, Dr Erskine, Mr Evans, Mr Palmer, Professor Tucker and Mrs Webber.

The President referred to the Yearly Meeting of the University Court which had taken place earlier in the day. The format of the event continued to evolve and the views of members of the Council on its further development would be welcomed.

The President reported the deaths of:

**Emeritus Professor Peter Dunn** who had been appointed Professor of Applied Physical Sciences in 1965 and had retired in 1992.

**Mr Peter Kalkhof** who had been appointed Lecturer in Fine Art in 1966 and had retired in 1999.

**Emeritus Professor Alan Wild** who had been appointed in 1944, had become Professor of Soil Science in 1979, had served as Dean of the Faculty of Science and had retired in 1989.

14/19 The minutes (14/01-14/17) of the meeting held on 24 January 2014 were confirmed and signed.

Arising on the Minutes:

**Minute 14/02 (13/72): Report of the Appointments Committee**

It was reported that the President, acting on behalf of the Council, had appointed Dr P R Preston to fill the vacancy for a Chair of the Committee to hear appeals against decisions of the Faculty Promotions Groups for the period to 31 July 2017.

**Minute 14/10: Report of the Review of the National Centre for Language and Literacy**

It was reported that the President, acting on behalf of the Council, had appointed the following to membership of the Restructuring Committee for the National Centre for Language and Literacy in accordance with the University’s Review and Restructuring Policy:
A Chairman (Mr R Dwyer)
A member of the Council not being a person employed by the University (Mr S Hawker)
A member of the Academic Staff nominated by the Senate (Dr H Osbahr)
A Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Professor G Brooks)
The relevant Dean (Professor G H Tucker)
The relevant Head of School (Professor R J Richards)
The Director of Human Resources or his nominee (Ms C Bryan).

Mr Dwyer reported that the Restructuring Committee had begun its work and was making good progress.

14/20 Report of the Strategy and Finance Committee (Item 2(a))

* The Council received the Report of the meetings of the Strategy and Finance Committee held on 3 February and 3 March 2014 relating to items for report.

Resolved:

“1. That, with reference to item 3, the decision to enter into a loan agreement with the Homes and Communities Agency to assist with the construction of the Eastern Relief Road be formally ratified.”

“2. That the Report of the meetings of the Strategy and Finance Committee held on 3 February and 3 March 2014 relating to items for report, now submitted, be received.”

14/21 Documents sealed and to be sealed (Item 2(b))

* 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.”

14/22 Report of the Vice-Chancellor (Item 3)

The Vice-Chancellor:

(a) outlined the steps that were being taken to attract as many well-qualified students to Reading as possible in a context which saw Home undergraduate applications down and overseas applications holding steady. Colleagues throughout the University were to be commended for their teamwork in ensuring that a positive impression was presented at all times. For 2015, the effects of the removal by Government of the cap on student numbers could represent an opportunity for the University to increase student numbers
provided such growth was accompanied by a nuanced approach to entry
grades and conditions for individual programmes but which upheld
standards overall. The University was doing all it could to maintain and
enhance its position in an increasingly dynamic and unpredictable market;

(b) welcomed the extent to which Schools and Services had aligned their Three-
Year Plans to the themes suggested by the University Strategy. The outcome
of the Three-Year Planning Exercise for 2014-17 had recently been
communicated to Heads of School and Service and had been conditioned by
the need to maintain a central contingency and to return an operating
surplus (of not less than £1m) for the financial year ending 31 July 2015;

(c) described the active engagement of the student body with the National
Student Survey and noted a number of recent enhancements to the student
experience, such as 24-hour opening of the Library, technological
improvements and the planned extension of social space within the café area
of the Students’ Union Building;

(d) referred to concerns emerging at the national level around the long-term
sustainability of the present student funding system, industrial action
threatened by the University and College Union (UCU) and the potential
impact of the impending triennial valuation of the Universities
Superannuation Scheme (USS). The University would continue to evaluate
the likely effects of these and other developments, and to take mitigating
action as and when appropriate;

(e) noted the interest in universities that had newly been taken by the Office of
Fair Trading and the commitment of that Office to work with institutions to
manage any increased regulatory burden that might result.

(f) spoke of a number of events that had recently taken place, such as Donor
Day and the opening at Whiteknights of a branch of Santander, and referred
to his own visits to Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia where he had met
large numbers of enthusiastic and supportive alumni.

In response to a question from Professor Mueller-Harvey, the Vice-Chancellor
explained that, consequent upon the departure of the Director of Campaigns and
Supporter Engagement to a post elsewhere, the launch of a major fundraising
campaign had been deferred to 2015 and the recruitment of a campaign team to full
strength had been paused for the time being.

Resolved:

“That the Report of the Vice-Chancellor, now submitted, be approved.”

14/23 Reform of the Charter, Statutes and Ordinances (Item 4)

* Mrs Julie Rowe, the University’s Employment Solicitor, made a presentation to the
Council on the project to reform the Charter, Statutes and Ordinances (copy
inserted in Minute Book).
Following Mrs Rowe’s presentation, the President reminded the Council that the project had come about as one result of the most recent Review of the Effectiveness of the Council. In response to a question from Sir John Sunderland, it was explained that, notwithstanding the continuing debate over the extent to which a university’s governing body should have oversight of its academic portfolio, there was no intention to erode the role of the Senate; and, in response to a question from Dame Moira Gibb, the Council was assured that arrangements were in train to learn from the experience of other institutions which, as proposed here, had elected to retain a Charter and Ordinances but to remove the Statutes in their entirety.

At the invitation of the President, the University Secretary explained that the project was being overseen by a Project Board established by, and reporting in the first instance to, the University Executive Board. Mr Dwyer, Dr Preston and Dr Cosh had agreed to act as consultants to the Project Board which had devised two alternative timetables, both of which had the capacity to enable revised instruments of governance to be implemented with effect from 1 August 2015. The President impressed upon those concerned that the more ambitious of these timetables should not be pursued at the expense of the Council having the opportunity for an informed discussion of the proposed changes in full session.

14/24 Reports of the Strategy and Finance Committee (Item 5)

* The Council received the Reports of the meetings of the Strategy and Finance Committee held on 3 February and 3 March 2014 relating to items for discussion and decision.

In regard to item 5(a), University Strategy: Efficiency and Effectiveness Programme, the Chief Operating Officer reported progress across the piece in each of the five key component areas of IT, Commercial, Customer (incorporating “the student journey”), Planning Institutional Performance and Professional and Administrative Services.

As Chair of the Audit Committee, Mr Sherman reported that he had held an initial meeting earlier in the day with the Chief Operating Officer in regard to the terms under which consultants to the programme were to be engaged, the extent to which they were to be involved and the value for money arising from that involvement. He had gained the impression that the arrangement was well-founded but discussion would continue. Mr Pryce identified effective communication as fundamental to the success of the programme and Mr Hawker suggested that an activity of such magnitude arguably warranted scrutiny and assurance from a wholly independent standpoint. The Vice-Chancellor and the Chief Operating Officer undertook to reflect further on these matters and to report to a future meeting of the Council. In response to a question from Mr Dwyer, the Chief Operating Officer explained that a ‘benefits tracker’, whereby progress against milestones might be measured and savings achieved against target might be recorded, was under development.

In regard to item 5(b), Estate Strategy, the President reminded the Council that, now the Halls Redevelopment Project was complete and the disposal of Bulmershe Court had been achieved, the next stage in the physical development
of the University was to invest in the academic estate. The Chief Operating Officer reported that further proceeds from land and property disposals could be expected from the imminent sale of Wells Hall and the commencement of marketing at Shinfield West.

Professor Mueller-Harvey commented that the Estate Strategy made no mention of those activities of the School of Agriculture, Policy and Development that relied on facilities currently housed within a Temporary Office Building (TOB): the Vice-Chancellor undertook to clarify the matter. Further, Professor Ellis noted that the document significantly understated the University’s strategic ambition to increase its numbers of postgraduate research students: this would be corrected. Finally, the Vice-Chancellor undertook to arrange a tour of the estate for members immediately prior to the point at which the Council was to be asked to agree the funding for a suite of individual projects.

In regard to item 5(c), Financial Report: January 2014, the Director of Finance highlighted the risks that continued to attend the achievement of an operating surplus by the Academic Group for the year ending 31 July 2014. In contrast, exceptional items would lead to a significant surplus for the University Group over the same period.

In regard to item 5(d), Report of the Health and Safety Committee, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Professor Williams) reported that steps were be taken to raise awareness of the dangers to all users of the campuses that were presented by the close conjunction of pedestrian, cycle and vehicular traffic. Increased numbers of buses serving Whiteknights were to be welcomed but had the potential to exacerbate this situation.

In regard to item 5(e), Major Capital Projects, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor was newly returned from Malaysia and could attest at first hand to significant progress with work on site.

Resolved:

“That:

(a) the paper entitled University Strategy: Efficiency and Effectiveness Programme, now submitted, be received;
(b) the Estate Strategy, now submitted, be approved;
(c) the Financial Report for January 2014, now submitted, be received;
(d) the Report of the Health and Safety Committee, now submitted, be received;
(e) the Report on Major Capital Projects, now submitted, be approved.”

14/25 Report of the Student Experience Committee (Item 6)

* The Council received the Report of the meeting of the Student Experience Committee held on 10 February 2014.

As Chair, Mr Dwyer noted that this had been the inaugural meeting of the Committee and that it would be seeking to refine its role over time. In focussing
on employability, the Committee had been concerned to understand the ways in which the University imparted a distinctive and competitive edge to its students in preparation for the world of work. The Vice-Chancellor reassured the Council that such considerations featured strongly within the University Strategy.

Resolved:

“That the Report of the meeting of the Student Experience Committee held on 10 February 2014, now submitted, be approved.”

14/26 Report of the Senate (Item 7)

* The Council received the Report of the meeting of the Senate held on 12 March 2014.

Resolved:

“1. That, with reference to item 1,

(a) Professor Julian Park be appointed as Head of the School of Agriculture, Policy and Development for the period from 1 August 2014 to 31 July 2018; and

(b) Professor Dominik Zaum be appointed as Head of the School of Politics, Economics and International Relations for the period from 1 August 2014 to 31 July 2018.”

“2. That, with reference to item 2, and under the provisions of Ordinance XXIV, the title of Professor Emeritus be conferred on each of the following with effect from 1 January 2014:

Professor Richard Bradley
Professor Galen Strawson.”

“3. That, with reference to item 3, the following members of the Academic Staff who are retiring early, each be accorded the title of Honorary Fellow for a period of five years with effect from 1 January 2014 unless otherwise stated:

Ms Sheila Billard (1 February 2014)
Mrs Carol Derham
Mrs Carolyn Lyle
Mrs Eleanor Rose
Mr John Scarrott.”

“4. That, with reference to item 4, a revised Student Complaints Procedure be approved to take effect from 1 April 2014, and that, in consequence, the Complaints Committee be abolished.”

“5. That the Report of the meeting of the Senate held on 12 March 2014, now submitted, be approved.”
14/27 Report of the Appointments Committee (Item 8)

* The Council received the Report of the meeting of the Appointments Committee held on 3 February 2014.

Resolved:

That:

“1. Lord Crisp of Eaglescliffe be appointed to membership of the Council in Class 2 to serve for the period from 1 August 2014 to 31 July 2017;

“2. Mr R E R Evans, Dr P R Preston and Ms S M Woodman each be re-appointed to membership of the Council in Class 2 to serve for the period from 1 August 2014 to 31 July 2017;

“3. Mr T Bartlam and Mr H W A Palmer each be re-appointed to membership of the Council in Class 2 to serve for a period from 1 August 2014 up to 31 July 2017;

“4. that Ms S M Woodman be re-appointed a Vice-President of the Council to serve for the period from 1 August 2014 to 31 July 2017;

“5. the Report of the meeting of the Appointments Committee held on 3 February 2014, now submitted, be approved.”

14/28 Report of the Audit Committee (Item 9)

* The Council received the Report of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 20 February 2014.

As Chair of the Committee, Mr Sherman welcomed a suggestion that the Committee henceforth report to the Council on its work more extensively than had traditionally been the case.

Resolved:

“1. That, with reference to item 2, the appointment of KPMG as external auditors to the University be confirmed for the financial year ending 31 July 2014.”

“2. “That the Report of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 20 February 2014, now submitted, be approved.”

14/29 Matters relevant to Statute XXXIII (Item 10)

* The Council received a report from the University Secretary on matters relevant to Statute XXXIII.
Resolved:

“That a report from the University Secretary on matters relevant to Statute XXXIII, now submitted, be approved.”

14/30 Date of the final meeting of the Council in the Session 2013-14

Monday 14 July 2014 at 2.15pm.

14/31 Provisional dates for meetings of the Council in the Session 2014-15

Friday 21 November 2014 at 2.15pm
Friday 23 January 2015 at 2.15pm
Monday 23 March 2015 at 2.15pm preceded by a meeting of the Court in the morning
Monday 13 July 2015 at 2.15pm