

Academic and Governance Services



Council

19/18 A meeting of the Council was held in Room G04, Chancellor's Building, on Monday 18 March 2019 at 2.15 pm.

The President
The Vice-Presidents (Mr R.E.R. Evans and Mrs K. Owen)
The Vice-Chancellor
The Deputy Vice-Chancellor
The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Professor M. Fellowes)
The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Mr V. Raimo)
The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Professor P. Yaqoob)

Mr T. Beardmore-Grey	Ms H. Gordon
Mr D. Bentley	Ms M. Hargreaves
Professor L. Butler	Professor J.R. Park
Mr K. Corrigan	Mr S.C.C. Pryce
Mrs P. Egan	Dr B. Rawal
Miss L.-M. Firmin <i>vice RUSU President</i>	Mr S.P. Sherman
Professor C.L. Furneaux	Ms S.M. Woodman

The Chief Strategy Officer and University Secretary

In attendance:

The Chief Financial Officer
RUSU Activities Officer (Miss A. Perry)
RUSU Diversity Officer (Miss N. Tollworthy)
The Director of Student Services
The Director of Student Wellbeing Services
The Director of Quality Support and Development

Apologies were received from Professor J. Board, Mr J. Dabydoyal, and Dr P. Erskine.

The President welcomed Professor Van de Noort to the Council for the first time in his capacity as Vice-Chancellor.

19/19 The minutes (19/01-19/14) of the meeting held on 25 January 2019 and the minutes (19/15-19/17) of the exceptional meeting held on 21 February 2019 were confirmed and signed.

Items for note

19/20 Documents sealed and to be sealed (Item 4.1)

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."

Main items of business: strategic and governance matters for discussion

19/21 Student mental health (Item 5.1)

Mrs Owen introduced a presentation on student mental health/wealth by the RUSU Welfare Officer, the Director of Student Services, and the Director of Student Wellbeing Services, which drew on detailed consideration of the topic by the Student Experience Committee over several meetings.

The RUSU Welfare Officer introduced a short film illustrating students' expectations of university, their experiences on arrival and throughout their time at university, and the implications for their sense of wellbeing. The transition from school and home to university, issues around accommodation, adapting to the greater intellectual demands of higher education, and concerns about careers offered challenges and could leave students feeling insecure and vulnerable. Students, and male students in particular, often felt inhibited about acknowledging such feelings and sharing them with either their peers or professionals.

The Director of Student Services and Director of Student Wellbeing Services explained the University's commitment to foster positive mental health among students, while also providing services to support students who were experiencing difficulties. The University mapped its provision against a UUK good practice guide, but benchmarking against practice in other institutions was difficult. It was important to recognise that universities' wellbeing services articulated with NHS services rather than providing parallel provision, and that effective liaison with the NHS was critical to ensuring that students were adequately supported. A university's duty of care required that its staff, on becoming aware of a student's need, ensure that the student have access to appropriate expertise and support. Staff received continuing professional development and ongoing support to fulfil this obligation.

The Director of Student Wellbeing Services referred to some of the services provided to support students, including early engagement with applicants who declared a disability on their UCAS form, a drop-in service provided by the Welfare team, counselling (which supported around 7% of the student population), a life tools programme to equip students with a range of strategies to develop resilience, and the Big White Wall, which was an online space in which students could access reflective tools, advice and other support.

The Director of Student Services explained the challenges and dilemmas which staff faced in supporting students, which included: an expectation that the University could compensate for under-resourced local services; the balance between maintaining a student's right to privacy and providing information to a parent to enable appropriate support; the parameters of feasible adjustments in complex cases; and reconciling the rights of students who were disruptive due to mental health issues with the rights of students sharing accommodation with them.

Members of Council discussed a number of case studies, which provided an insight into the nature of the issues which students faced and the dilemmas faced by support staff.

The President thanked the RUSU Welfare Officer, the Director of Student Services, and the Director of Student Wellbeing Services for a stimulating and illuminating presentation.

19/22 Oral Report on RUSU Priorities (Item 5.2)

The Council received an oral update on the student experience from those RUSU officers who were present.

The officers reported that the RUSU Elections had been rescheduled as a mark of respect for the student who had recently died on campus, and had been compressed into a three-day period. Notwithstanding the revised schedule, the turnout (1750) had declined only marginally relative to the previous year, and a new team with strong manifestos had been elected.

They also reported on a range of recent RUSU activity, including campaigns on period poverty, consent, student safety, body positivity, 'relax and revise' in the run-up to the examination period, breaking down barriers to students' participation in sport, and the BAME attainment gap. RUSU had also promoted celebration of the Chinese New Year. The Varsity sports tournament against Oxford Brookes University was currently being organised.

The officers were pleased with their progress against their manifesto commitments.

The President commended the RUSU officers for their leadership of wide-ranging initiatives which promoted the student interest and enriched their experience.

19/23 Report of the Student Experience Committee (Item 5.3)

The Council received the Report of the meeting of the Student Experience Committee held on 4 February 2019.

Resolved:

“That the Report of the meeting of the Student Experience Committee held on 4 February 2019, now submitted, be approved.”

19/24 Report of the Review of Modern Languages (Item 6)

The Council received the Report of the Review of Modern Languages.

The Council acknowledged the student demonstration being held outside the Chancellor's Building which was protesting against the proposals contained in the Report.

The Vice-Chancellor explained that the Department of Modern Languages and European Studies (MLES) had a significant annual deficit (circa £500k) and was not expected to improve its financial position over the five-year planning period. Modern languages were also delivered by the Institution-Wide Language Programme (IWLP) in the International Study and Language Institute (ISLI). A review had been undertaken with the objective of ensuring the long-term sustainable delivery of modern language provision at the University. Having carefully considered the matter, the review group had recommended a merger between MLES and IWLP with effect from 1 August 2019, that staffing levels at IWLP and MLES be reduced to 24.5-29.5 FTE from the current total of 37.68 FTE, and that research in the merged unit take a thematic rather than a language-based approach, focussing on migration and conflict, contemporary cultural identities, and European publishing.

The Vice-Chancellor advised that a member of the Senate, who was a member of academic staff in MLES, had presented a detailed response to the Report. Her response had raised concerns *inter alia* that the review's terms of reference had changed during the course of the review, and that the decline in student numbers in MLES had been represented as a long-term trend whereas the decline had only happened recently and students numbers had previously increased. The Vice-Chancellor noted that the terms of reference had changed due to a worsening financial situation in MLES, and that the earlier increase in MLES student numbers had been due to the introduction of Spanish to the programme portfolio, which had incurred significant costs.

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Planning and Resource) indicated that the only alternative to the proposed option was a more substantial reduction in staffing and the removal of research capacity, which would have adverse consequences for the department's reputation and student recruitment, and therefore its long-term financial position. Applications for modern languages were in general decline nationally, reflecting a decline in students taking modern languages at GCSE and A level. He hoped that non-appointment to current vacancies and voluntary redundancies would minimise the impact of the recommended option on current staff. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Planning and Resource) paid tribute to the constructive engagement of staff with the recommendations.

In response to questions, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Planning and Resource) confirmed that all students in MLES would continue on their programmes, although there might be a reduction in the range of optional modules available, while the range of languages offered as part of the IWLP portfolio would remain unchanged.

The RUSU Activities Officer raised concerns that the recommendations implied material changes to the programmes which students in MLES had

applied for and accepted, given that the range of options would be reduced and language teaching would potentially be delivered in mixed groups including both degree students and IWLP students who had distinct needs. He also raised a concern that students had only been consulted after the review group had determined its recommendations. The Vice-Chancellor acknowledged the argument that students should have been consulted at an earlier stage, although, in principle, the recommendations did not imply a major change in the student experience. Options would still include modules with a cultural, literary, historical and cinematic focus. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Planning and Resource) advised that he was meeting with students later in the week.

In response to a question, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Planning and Resource) informed the Council that six external advisers had been consulted in the course of the review, and that each had been sent, and had confirmed the accuracy of, the transcript of their comments.

In response to a question about the sustainability of the recommended solution, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Planning and Resource) affirmed his confidence in the leadership of the School and department to lead the implementation of the recommendations effectively, and in the pragmatism and commitment of staff in MLES to work towards a successful outcome. Professor Furneaux asked that particular consideration be given to the administrative arrangements for the IWLP, which were logistically complex, and would benefit from dedicated support. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Planning and Resource) recognised that, in the short-term, NSS results in modern languages were likely to decline, but hoped that the merger would provide opportunities to improve the University's position in the NSS and league tables in modern languages and in joint programmes to which modern languages contributed.

Resolved:

“That:

1. the Report of the Review of Modern Languages, now submitted, be received and approved;
2. the University Executive Board's recommendation to establish a Consultation Group in accordance with the University's Restructuring Policy be approved.”

Matters for report

19/25 Sub-Group of Council on the University of Reading Malaysia (Item 7)

The Council received the Minutes of the meeting of the Sub-Group of Council on the University of Reading Malaysia held on 14 February 2019. Mr Raimo and Professor Brooks, who were Directors of RUMAL, did not withdraw from the meeting for this item since the business related to matters for report rather than matters for decision.

Mr Raimo outlined key features of the new business model under preparation, including a reduction in the campus space available to UoRM (and corresponding reduction in rent), rationalisation of the programme portfolio, an explicit focus on UoRM as a teaching intensive institution, and a reduction in staffing. Professor Brooks reported that the available options had been explained to UoRM staff, and that Heads of Section were now working with the Provost to develop the business plan.

In response to questions, Mr Raimo indicated that UoRM was not yet able to recruit to the LLB programme as formal approval was still pending, but approval was expected in time to recruit a small cohort in September 2019. Modelling of student numbers for the new business model would be based on conservative assumptions.

Resolved:

“That the Minutes of the meeting of the Sub-Group of Council on the University of Reading Malaysia held on 14 February 2019, now submitted, be received.”

19/26 Report of the Vice-Chancellor (Item 8)

The Vice-Chancellor:

- (a) reported that, at the President’s request, he had been working on a new University strategy which he expected would be in place by the beginning of the next academic year. He noted that the current strategy had been successful in several respects, most particularly in achieving its target for growth in student numbers, but it had been conceived in a very different environment and was no longer fit for purpose as a guide to the period until 2026. The Vice-Chancellor outlined four principles at the core of the proposed strategy: the University community works together constructively to solve problems and create opportunities for the advancement of the University; the University transforms lives through the quality and impact of its teaching and research, which, in turn, is reflected in the University’s

reputation and standing; the University ensures its financial sustainability, achieved, in part, through greater efficiencies in Schools and Functions; and the University is a civic University, contributing to Reading and Wokingham and helping to address social inequalities, as well as a global University.

The Council supported the development of the new strategy and its broad outlines. A number of members suggested that the strategy might usefully be more student-centric and articulate more clearly the University's commitment to supporting students to achieve their ambitions.

In response to questions, the Vice-Chancellor accepted that the emerging strategy was less elaborate and less explicitly aspirational than the current strategy. He intended that Schools and Functions should be able readily to identify how the principles could be fulfilled locally, and that the strategy include an expectation that the performance of each School should be in the top quartile for their discipline(s). In respect of the timescale, the Vice-Chancellor hoped that it would be possible to make rapid progress in some areas, but that 2026 seemed a reasonable horizon for the achievement of its principal objectives.

The President proposed that Council and Senate might hold a combined meeting jointly to consider the developing strategy.

- (b) reported that he had met with the President of the local branch of the UCU to discuss its concerns following its motion of no confidence in the current University Council, senior management, and the University's governance structure. The Vice-Chancellor had acknowledged UCU's concerns and had undertaken to update the Council.

The President reported that, for his part, he had written to the President of the local UCU branch seeking to understand more fully the range of concerns. He noted that some of the issues identified related to decisions taken some time ago by office-holders who had now left; however, there might be virtue in considering historic concerns in order to inform thinking about future actions. The Council noted that UCU represented a minority of University staff, and agreed the need to engage with a wider cross-section of staff. Ms Hargreaves noted that the Staff Forum now encompassed all staff, including Grade 6 and above, and would provide a vehicle for such wider consultation.

A number of lay members expressed support for the approach adopted, while indicating that they would have appreciated being alerted earlier to the motion of no confidence. The Council agreed that it would be appropriate for the President to offer a balanced response to the motion, acknowledging shortcomings and providing a simple, careful, and, where appropriate, robust explanation of the decisions and actions taken. The President would also meet with the President of the local UCU branch.

Resolved:

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

19/27 Report of the Senate (Item 9)

The Council received the Report of the meeting of the Senate held on 6 March 2019.

Professor Yaqoob referred to the requirements of the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2021, the significant changes relative to the previous methodology, and the University’s planning and preparation for its submission. She noted that the REF2021 rules permitted the inclusion of staff who had been made redundant; the local branch of the University and College Union (UCU) had raised objections to the University’s proposal to include such staff and, in consequence, the UCU branch might withhold its endorsement of the Code of Practice.

Resolved:

“That the Report of the meeting of the Senate held on 6 March 2019, now submitted, be approved.”

19/28 Report of the meeting of the Strategy and Finance Committee (Item 10)

The Council received a Report of the meeting of the Strategy and Finance Committee held on 4 March 2019 relating to items for report.

The Council noted progress in relation to the resolution of issues in respect of the National Institute for Research in Dairying (NIRD) Trust. The Vice-Chancellor reported that he had written to the President of the local branch of the University and College Union (UCU) clarifying the relationship between the University and the NIRD Trust, acknowledging shortcomings in the former arrangements, and correcting some misconceptions in UCU’s statements on this matter.

The President noted the commercial sensitivity of the report on finance matters and, in consequence, the importance of holding the information in confidence.

The Chief Financial Officer confirmed that controlling costs remained a priority, and noted that there were no plans to realise investment assets in the near future.

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Planning and Resource) reported that there had been significant interest in the voluntary redundancy scheme, but applications had come disproportionately from non-academic staff. The University hoped to avoid the need to proceed to compulsory redundancies. The Vice-Chancellor indicated that, alongside the redundancy scheme, there would be further discussion about performance expectations in relation to teaching and research, and further efficiencies in functions.

Resolved:

“That the Report of the meeting of the Strategy and Finance Committee held on 4 March 2019 relating to items for report, now submitted, be received.”

19/29 Report of the Audit Committee (Item 11)

The Council received the Report of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 14 February 2019.

Resolved:

“That the Report of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 14 February 2019, now submitted, be approved.”

19/30 Report of the Investments Committee (Item 12)

The Council received the Report of the meeting of the Investments Committee held on 25 February 2019.

Mr Pryce, as Chair of the Committee, noted that the National Institute for Research in Dairying (NIRD) Trust Committee and the University’s NIRD Negotiating Committee were progressing their work to ensure appropriate and effective governance arrangements for NIRD and resolving outstanding financial issues between NIRD and the University.

In response to questions, the Vice-Chancellor confirmed that legal advice had been taken on the composition of the NIRD Trust Committee, and that its current composition was sufficiently independent of the University and consistent with good governance. He noted that the University was the sole trustee and the sole beneficiary of the NIRD Trust, and that it would not be appropriate for the Trust Committee not to include University membership.

Resolved:

“That the Report of the meeting of the Investments Committee held on 25 February 2019, now submitted, be approved.”

19/31 Report of the Appointments and Governance Committee (Item 13)

The Council received the Report of the meeting of the Appointments and Governance Committee held on 29 January 2019.

The President noted that, in addition to three existing vacancies, three lay members would shortly be retiring from the Council, and he reported that the recent advertisement for new lay members had attracted a good number of expressions of interest which were of high quality and which mapped well to the skill sets which Council would require. The appointments panel would shortly select a long-list.

The Council welcomed the continuing work on succession planning and organisational resilience.

Resolved:

“That the Report of the meeting of the Appointments and Governance Committee, held on 29 January 2019, now received, be approved.”

19/32 Report of the Remuneration Committee (Item 14)

The Council received the Report of the meeting of the Remuneration Committee held on 29 January 2019.

In response to a question from Mr Evans, the Vice-Chancellor reported that, in the recent University and College Union national ballot on industrial action, the turnout had fallen short of the 50% threshold legally required for industrial action to be implemented.

Resolved:

“That the Report of the meeting of the Remuneration Committee held on 29 January 2019, now submitted, be approved.”

19/33 Matters which the Council wished to refer to the Strategy and Finance Committee

No matters were referred to the Strategy and Finance Committee on this occasion.

19/34 Departures from Council

The President noted that Mr Dabydoyal and Mr Bentley would complete their terms of office before the next meeting of the Council. He thanked them for their valuable contributions to the Council and for their wider service to the Students' Union and the University community. Mr Bentley thanked the Council for its support in improving the student experience.

The President congratulated Professor Butler on his appointment as Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Dean of the Faculty of Science and Engineering at Anglia Ruskin University, and thanked him for his contribution to the Council and to the University.

19/35 Date of the final meeting of the Council in the Session 2018-19

The final meeting of the Council in the current Session would be held on Monday 8 July 2019 at 2.15 pm.