

Academic and Governance Services



Council

19/01 A meeting of the Council was held in the Meadow Suite, Park House, on Thursday 24 January 2019 at 2.15 pm.

The President
The Vice-President (Mr R.E.R. Evans)
The Vice-President (Mrs K. Owen)
The Acting Vice-Chancellor (*withdrew for Minute 19/04*)
The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (*withdrew for Minute 19/10*)
The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Professor M. Fellowes)
The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Mr V. Raimo) (*withdrew for Minute 19/10*)
The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Professor P. Yaqoob)

Mr T. Beardmore-Gray	Professor C.L. Furneaux
Mr D. Bentley	Ms H. Gordon
Professor J. Board (<i>withdrew for Minute 19/10</i>)	Ms M. Hargreaves
Professor L. Butler	Mr S.C.C. Pryce
Mr K. Corrigan	Mr S.P. Sherman
Mr J. Dabydoyal	Ms S.M. Woodman
Dr P. Erskine	

The Chief Strategy Officer and University Secretary

In attendance:

The Chief Financial Officer
The Director of Quality Support and Development

Apologies were received from Mrs P. Egan, Professor J.R. Park, and Dr B. Rawal.

19/02 The President reminded members of the requirement to respect the confidentiality of Council's business.

19/03 The Minutes (18/51-18/77) of the meeting held on 28 November 2018 were confirmed and signed.

19/04 Update from the President on the recruitment of the Vice-Chancellor

The President reported that five candidates had been shortlisted for interview for the office of Vice-Chancellor. The selection committee had been impressed by the strength of the field. The selection process had been designed to include representation from across the university community, including students, academics, professional and administrative staff, and the leadership group. Meetings with groups of staff would be held on 14 February and the interviews on 15 February 2019. A short meeting of the Council would be held on 4 March 2019 at 9.30 am to receive the recommendation of the Appointments and Governance Committee.

Items for note

19/05 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

19/06 Student priorities (Item 5.1)

The Council received an oral update from Mr Dabydoyal, RUSU President, and Mr Bentley, RUSU Welfare Officer, on the progress of RUSU campaigns and initiatives.

Mr Dabydoyal and Mr Bentley reported that the priorities of the sabbatical team were on track. Mr Bentley referred to campaigns in relation to period poverty, breaking down barriers to participation in sports and recreation, relaxation and effective revision, mental health, and body confidence in the context of social media. RUSU was also organising a celebration of Chinese New Year. Mr Dabydoyal reported that nominations for next year's RUSU officers had opened, and that RUSU was promoting greater awareness of personal financial management, conducting market research into the National Student Survey, developing a RUSU Strategic Operating Plan, and hosting a series of Brexit and NUS talks to encourage wider political conversations.

19/07 Teaching Excellence Framework (Item 5.2)

The Council received a briefing paper on the Subject-level Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) Pilot 2018-19.

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor reported that the University was making good progress in its preparation of submissions for the TEF Pilot. [Redacted, sec 43]. Awards were determined on the basis of a consideration of nine metrics and the University's statements. While the metrics indicated that the University fell on the borderline

between a [Redacted, sec 43] award, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor was confident that the eventual outcome of the pilot would be [Redacted, sec 43] (which was the award achieved in the TEF 2017). The outcome of the pilot would be private to the University. He reported that the University's work on the TEF Pilot was being undertaken within existing resource.

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor reported that the formal Subject-level TEF would be launched in 2020 and its outcomes published in 2021. The methodology would be determined in the light of the pilot and an independent review.

In response to a question [Redacted, sec 43], the Deputy-Vice Chancellor advised that the metrics included the National Student Survey results for the period 2016-2018, which had been adversely affected by the refurbishment of the Library, the UCU industrial action, the Professional and Administrative Services restructuring, and the Students' Union's boycott of the NSS. He explained that the Teaching and Learning Strategy Board had developed a robust NSS Action Plan, which was designed to drive improvements in the NSS both in the short and longer term. However, the disappointing NSS results for 2017 and 2018 would remain in the time series for the 2020 TEF exercise. He reported that the University had positive employment metrics over the relevant period.

In response to a question from Mr Pryce, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor confirmed that the University was undertaking a number of strategic initiatives designed to effect substantial improvements in the student experience and in the NSS results, and, equally, that Schools were addressing issues related to their students' programmes and the quality of teaching. The Acting Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Professor Furneaux variously spoke of the introduction of the new Academic Tutoring System which was improving the academic and pastoral support available to students, changes in the promotion criteria for academics which recognised teaching and learning more fully, and greater oversight and more effective management of staff performance in relation to teaching. [Redacted, sec 43]. The School was undertaking a comprehensive curriculum review and had initiated major projects to address issues around assessment and feedback and the student voice, but, due to consumer law, major changes to the curriculum could not easily be introduced for current cohorts, which meant, in turn, a long interval before any positive impact of these initiatives on the NSS results. Individual staff performance could also be a factor in NSS results and needed to be carefully managed. Professor Board referred to areas in which the University was notably successful and which offered material for compelling narratives, and he urged that the University, drawing on external marketing expertise, review how it positioned itself and projected its strengths.

The Acting Vice-Chancellor noted that the University historically had elected not to focus on league tables, and argued that this had been an omission. Other universities had managed their league table position as part of their institutional strategy, and had succeeded in improving their ranking. Evidence indicated that league tables were a significant factor in applicants' choice of university. Under the proposed new strategy, NSS and league table rankings would be a key reference point for the University and would inform priorities for Schools, Functions and individual members of staff. The President endorsed the need for a sharper focus on targets and milestones in relation to the NSS and league tables, and for this to become a key element of the University's culture.

Resolved:

“That a paper on the Teaching Excellence Framework, now submitted, be received.”

19/08 Admissions position for 2019 entry (Item 6)

The Council received a paper on the admissions position for the 2019 entry.

[Redacted, sec 43].

Mr Raimo reminded Council that, notwithstanding the demographic decline and challenging international market, the University had grown its student intake year on year in the five years prior to 2018, and had increased its total population by 25% over the period. [Redacted, sec 43]. The University Executive Board had agreed not to lower its entry threshold in order to maintain the quality of its intake and the standing of the University. Mr Raimo advised that, in the light of last year’s position, the University had reduced its admissions targets for September 2019 to a more realistic level, [Redacted, sec 43].

Mr Raimo reported that applications for PhDs had [Redacted, sec 43] relative to the equivalent point last year, and postgraduate taught applications had [Redacted, sec 43]. Forecasts indicated that, at this stage, admissions for PhDs and for postgraduate taught programmes were likely to meet their targets, although it was too early in the cycle to make confident predictions and both markets were volatile.

He also reported that applications for undergraduate programmes had [Redacted, sec 43] overall (which included a [Redacted, sec 43] in Overseas applicants), which was a [Redacted, sec 43] than the sector (-0.7%) and the UCAS-defined competitor group (-2.1%). [Redacted, sec 43]. In respect of undergraduates, forecasts suggested [Redacted, sec 43] against the Home/EU target and [Redacted, sec 43] against the Overseas target. The University was working hard to convert offers to acceptances, and had increased personalised engagement with applicants by academic staff in Schools. Mr Raimo also spoke of the importance of partnerships for the recruitment of international students.

In response to a question from the President, Mr Raimo explained that an institution’s inclusion in the top 200 institutions in international league tables was a critical factor in the recruitment of international PhD and postgraduate taught students, whether funded by a scholarship organisation or privately. While the University had held its position in the top 200 in some international league tables, its position and the position of some other UK institutions was under threat from the improving performance of Chinese universities. International league tables attached considerable weight to measures of research performance.

In response to further questions, the Acting Vice-Chancellor and other members of UEB acknowledged the need to develop a better understanding of future applicants and the factors which inform their decisions. During a

period of rapid change in the higher education environment, the University had been successful in attracting students and in growing student numbers, and had responded effectively to the initial challenges of marketization. The increasing differentiation within the market and the changing behaviour of other institutions in the face of financial risk, including the reduction in the tariff threshold for admissions, required the University to review its approach to recruitment. The Acting Vice-Chancellor advised that the revised strategy, to be discussed later in the meeting, addressed this issue in its larger aspect, and that actions were being taken in the short term to ensure improvements in the student experience which were informed by an understanding of students' wishes and expectations. Mr Dabydoyal and Mr Bentley endorsed the need for the University to understand its applicants and students better, but highlighted that students' views were varied and divergent, and fluctuated over time. The Acting Vice-Chancellor confirmed that UEB shared Council's sense of urgency about this matter, and that changes to improve the University's performance were in hand.

Resolved:

“That a paper on the admissions position for the 2019 entry, now submitted, be received.”

19/09 Strategic sustainability

The Council received a paper on the University's strategic sustainability.

The Acting Vice-Chancellor explained that, given the shortfall against the target student numbers in 2018 and the financial challenges facing the University, there was a pressing need to review and revise the University's strategy to ensure that the University could respond effectively to the changing operating environment. In consequence, he had developed, in outline, proposals for a new vision and strategy, which he hoped would assist the new Vice-Chancellor, once appointed, in their thinking about a new University Strategy.

He noted that the University had increased its student numbers by almost 25% since 2013/14, and had therefore very nearly achieved the growth targeted for 2026 in the current strategy. Given the accelerated expansion of Russell Group universities and the consequent reduction in the numbers of well-qualified applicants who were accepting places at Reading, it was now proposed that the University prioritise maintaining the quality of entrants over growth in student numbers.

He was also proposing: reprioritising the quality of teaching and research with the aim of all academic disciplines operating in the upper quartile by 2026 at the latest; improving the University's league table ranking; consolidating student numbers in areas where further growth would require a lower tariff; working in partnership with external partners to increase the University's real-world impact; and using the rapid economic growth of Reading and the rising demand for research partners and high quality graduates to the advantage of the University.

The Acting Vice-Chancellor explained that he had been visiting Schools and Functions to outline these proposals, and that, in all quarters, the response had been largely positive. Schools had expressed a strong commitment to maintaining

and improving the quality of education, and Functions were thinking creatively about more efficient and effective processes and practices. He affirmed the need for Schools to undertake high quality research and teaching, and indicated that, in future, there would be greater differentiation in resource allocation both to support the highest quality research and to improve the student learning experience.

In response to a question from Mr Evans, the Acting Vice-Chancellor confirmed that the relocation of the European Centre for Medium-term Weather Forecasting (ECMWF) remained a strategic priority given the range of benefits which a close working relationship would yield, including, among many others, research collaboration, access to research funding, and consequent impact on international league tables which would support international student recruitment.

In response to questions from Ms Hargreaves, the Acting Vice-Chancellor confirmed that spending on estates maintenance would be considered by the Planning Group, which was currently in the process of prioritising spending for the next five years. He indicated that reductions in maintenance budgets did not necessarily have an immediate impact on the student experience, and that investment should be directed where it was most needed and would have the greatest impact.

The Council commended the report, and expressed confidence that the University had identified the relevant issues and was addressing them appropriately.

Resolved:

“That a paper on the University’s strategic sustainability, now submitted, be received.”

19/10 University of Reading Malaysia (Item 8)

The Council received a paper on the University of Reading Malaysia (UoRM). The members of the Council who were also Directors of RUMAL absented themselves for the entirety of this item. The President clarified the distinction between Council’s and RUMAL’s responsibilities in this matter.

The Acting Vice-Chancellor noted that the Council had been expecting at this meeting to make a final decision in respect of its continuing investment in RUMAL and any consequential arrangements related to the University’s students and staff. He advised that, [Redacted, sec 43], it would be premature at this stage to invite Council to make a final decision, although further information will be available within a couple of weeks.

The Chief Financial Officer gave a presentation which provided an update on developments since the last meeting of Council and of Strategy and Finance Committee, and outlined the current options in respect of UoRM. She referred to the presentation to Council by Professor Wing Lam, Provost of UoRM, at its November meeting, which explained the position of UoRM at that point and his vision for UoRM in the future. The Chief Financial Officer was pleased to report that the Malaysian Ministry of Education had now excepted UoRM from its moratorium on new law degrees [Redacted, sec 43]. There were therefore several factors which indicated improved prospects for UoRM in the longer term, but these would have little impact on the shorter-term financial position. Feedback from

students indicated that they were positive about their programme, the facilities, and the student experience overall. However, the Chief Financial Officer reminded the Council that, in September 2018, student recruitment had fallen substantially short of target, which meant that the target for recruitment in April 2019 was extremely and overly challenging.

[Redacted, sec 43]

(a) [Redacted, sec 43]

[Redacted, sec 43]

(b) [Redacted, sec 43]

[Redacted, sec 43]

(c) [Redacted, sec 43]

(a) [Redacted, sec 43]

(b)

(b) a sub-group of the Council be established to receive a report from the University Executive Board on the available options and its recommendation, and, on behalf of the Council, [Redacted, sec 43]

(i) [Redacted, sec 43]

(ii) [Redacted, sec 43]

(iii) [Redacted, sec 43]

The sub-group would be appointed by the President.

(c) the sub-group be authorised to make decisions, on behalf of the Council, on the funding to be made available for the option to be adopted. In discharging this delegated power, the sub-group would be required to:

i) Act prudently and in accordance with the University's obligations as a charity; and

ii) make decisions that ensure the University's students and staff were treated lawfully and fairly; and

iii) fully document its decision and provide appropriate information to RUMAL;

Following its decisions, the sub-group's delegated authority would cease and the Council would resume its oversight of matters related to UoRM.

(d) [Redacted, sec 43]

Resolved:

“That:

- (a) a paper on the University of Reading Malaysia, now submitted, be received;
- (b) the recent developments in relation to the University of Reading Malaysia, as described in the paper, be noted;
- (c) a small panel be convened, comprising the President, the Vice-Presidents, the Acting Vice-Chancellor, one further lay member of Council, and one internal member of the Council not on the University Executive Board, to consider and determine, on behalf of the Council, the University’s continuing investment in RUMAL.”

Items of report

19/11 Report of the Acting Vice-Chancellor (Item 9)

The Council received the Acting Vice-Chancellor’s written report. In addition, the Acting Vice-Chancellor gave an oral report on the National Institute for Research in Dairying (NIRD), a charitable trust of which the University was the trustee. He made reference to deficiencies in the previous governance arrangements. An external, independent member had now been appointed to the NIRD Trust Committee and the University had established a Negotiating Group to negotiate with the NIRD concerning the governance arrangements. The Charity Commission and the Office for Students had been informed, and the Acting Vice-Chancellor had arranged a meeting with the Chief Executive of the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) to discuss the matter. A freelance journalist had requested information from the University on the topic and it was expected that a story would appear in the press shortly.

[Redacted, sec 43]

In response to a question from Ms Hargreaves, the Acting Vice-Chancellor explained that the current Voluntary Redundancy scheme had been necessitated by the failure to recruit to target in September 2018, which was now compounded by the disappointing indications for the recruitment cycle for the 2019 entry. He explained that, due to ongoing negotiations about UoRM, he was not able to comment on UoRM at his meetings with Schools and Functions. He noted that the finances of Schools and Functions contributed to, and were managed within, the Academic Group, whereas UoRM was part of the University Group.

Resolved:

“That:

- (a) a paper on Institutional Strategic Key Performance Indicators, now submitted, be received;
- (b) a paper on League Tables, now submitted, be received;
- (c) a tracker report on Major Projects, now submitted, be received;

(d) the Report of the Vice-Chancellor, now submitted, be approved.”

19/12 Report of the Investment Committee (Item 10)

The Council received a Report of the meetings of the Investment Committee held on 24 September and 10 December 2018.

Mr Pryce, as Chair of the Committee, reported that Wokingham Borough Council had granted planning consent for the British Museum Archaeological Research Collection (ARC), [Redacted, sec 43]. The upgrade would have future benefits for TVSP as the site developed.

Mr Pryce also referred to the University’s retention of investment grade credit rating by Standard and Poors, and the positive performance of the University’s investment portfolio. He reported that a report on the University’s farms and farmland requirements, prepared by Bidwells, had concluded that the current size of the farming operation was at the minimum level appropriate for the research and educational needs of the University, and that the University should consider replenishing farmland provision over time. The Committee believed, however, that there was a need to consider a longer term strategy which was beyond the scope of the current report. The Committee also noted the need to achieve an appropriate balance between reserving a proportion of asset sales for reinvestment and ensuring sufficient cashflow for further investment in the academic estate.

Resolved:

“That the Report of the meetings of the Investment Committee held on 24 September and 10 December 2018, now submitted, be approved.”

19/13 Report of the Strategy and Finance Committee (Item 11)

The Council received the Report of the meeting of the Strategy and Finance Committee held on 11 January 2019.

The Council noted that the deterioration in the performance of the University Group Quarter 1 Forecast was largely due to the transfer of the surplus from the sale of Didcot to a prior year, and deterioration of the Academic Group to the impact of the student recruitment shortfall against target. [Redacted, sec 43].

Resolved:

“That the Report of the meeting of the Strategy and Finance Committee held on 11 January 2019, now submitted, be approved.”

19/14 Dates of further meetings of the Council in the Session 2018/19

Further meetings of the Council in this Session had been scheduled for:

Monday 18 March 2019, 2.15pm

Monday 8 July 2019, 2.15pm.