

Academic and Governance Services



Council

21/44 An exceptional meeting of the Council was held online on Thursday 23 September 2021 at 2.00 pm.

The President	
The Vice-Presidents	(Mr T. Beardmore-Gray, Mrs H. Gordon, and Mrs K. Owen)
The Vice-Chancellor	
The Deputy Vice-Chancellor	
The Pro-Vice-Chancellor	(Professor M. Fellowes) (for Minute 21/51 only)
The Pro-Vice-Chancellor	(Professor E.M. McCrum)
The Pro-Vice-Chancellor	(Professor D. Zaum)

Professor J. Board	Mr J. Magee
Mrs S. Butler	Ms S. Maple
Professor R. Frazier	Mr P. Milhofer
Professor J. Gibbins	Ms L. Moses
Professor U. Kambhampati	Mrs S. Plank
Mr B. Knowles	Dr C. Shaw
Miss G. Loweth	

In attendance:

- Chief Strategy Officer and University Secretary
- Chief Financial Officer
- Director of Quality Support and Development
- The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Mr P. Inman) (for Minute 21/50 only)

Apologies were received from Mr K. Corrigan, Mrs P. Egan, Mr S.C.C. Pryce and Mr N. Richards.

21/45 The minutes (21/26-21/43) of the meeting held on 5 July 2021 were confirmed and signed.

Items for note

21/46 Matters approved by the President on behalf of the Council since its last meeting (Item 4)

The Council noted that the President, on behalf of Council, had approved:

- (a) an updated version of the University's Financial Regulations, previously approved by the Strategy and Finance Committee;
- (b) a support package to cover the costs of Covid tests/quarantine for international applicants who attend the University in person, to be given in the form of a fee discount.

21/47 Documents sealed and to be sealed (Item 5.1)

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."

21/48 Disclosure of Interests (Item 45.2)

The Council received a list of members' interests and members were asked to notify the University Secretary and Chief Strategy Officer of any amendments as necessary. Members were reminded to alert the University Secretary and Chief Strategy Officer to any items of business which gave rise to a potential conflict of interest and appropriate arrangements would be made.

Main items of business: strategic and governance matters for discussion

21/49 Values and standards (Item 6)

The Council received a paper from the Vice-Chancellor on the University's values and standards.

The Vice-Chancellor introduced the paper, noting that the University's values (or principles) and standards were articulated in a range of contexts, including its Royal Charter and other documents more closely related to operational practice. The Council welcomed the paper and the opportunity to discuss this matter. It noted that the Committee of University Chairs *Code of Governance* advised on the need for governing bodies, in fulfilling their responsibilities, to reflect regularly on the institutions' values and standards.

Breakout groups considered three questions and reported as follows:

Has the University expressed its values/principles and standards correctly and effectively?

The relevant breakout group believed that the Royal Charter articulated the University's values correctly, but considered that they were not visible enough and questioned whether they were readily understood. They would benefit from being expressed more clearly and from being linked more explicitly to the values identified in more practice-based documents, such as the 3Rs, the values and behaviours guidance, and the brand guidelines. The group also recommended that the values be reformulated as mandatory ('must') rather than optional ('could', 'should'). Thought should also be given to the different needs of internal and external audiences, and, in relation to the latter, the differences between local audiences (the University as a good neighbour) and national/international audiences (the University as a research and educational institution addressing national/international priorities and needs).

What, if anything, is missing from our values/principles and standards?

The relevant breakout group did not believe that anything was missing from the University's values and standards. The group questioned whether the University community was specifically aware of the values and standards and whether the values informed their day-to-day work and thinking. There would be benefit in considering how they could be simplified,

made more accessible, and brought to life for staff and students. It would be important to engage staff and students in thinking about the principles and their implications.

What approaches could the University take to further embed/raise awareness of our existing values and standards across the University community?

The relevant breakout group was pleased to note that the values and professional behaviours were used in the reward and recognition processes, including promotions. It believed that this offered a model and that the incorporation of values and standards into a wider range of processes (such as induction, performance review and business cases) would serve to embed them more widely across the University.

The Vice-Chancellor and the University Secretary and Chief Strategy Officer welcomed these comments and undertook to bring an action plan to Council in due course.

The President thanked Council for an excellent discussion. He believed that the values and professional behaviours were evident in the attitudes and conduct of many staff, but that there would be benefit in promoting wider awareness of them.

Resolved:

“That a paper on values and standards at the University of Reading, from the Vice-Chancellor, now submitted, be received.”

21/50 Report on progress under the Community Engagement pillar of the University Strategy (Item 7)

The Council received a Report on progress under the Community Engagement pillar of the University Strategy.

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (International) (Mr Inman) introduced the paper, referring to the different kinds of engagement between the University and the local community, the importance of engagement with local authorities, and the University’s contribution, as an anchor institution, to the local economy. Mr Inman outlined an action plan for community engagement.

In response to questions, Mr Inman explained that the Community Action Partnership (CAP), established by Dr S. Lloyd-Evans, the University’s Public Engagement with Community Research Fellow, was an important vehicle for developing relationships and joint projects with the local community. Mr Inman served as the UEB Community Champion. The Vice-Chancellor indicated that the University had transformed its relationship with the local community over the past few years by working together in partnership to solve shared challenges.

In response to further questions, the Vice-Chancellor noted that the University had become a key partner for Wokingham Borough Council in its strategic planning, and had worked with Reading Borough Council in its campaign for city status. The University also engaged with local MPs in relation to key University developments.

In response to a question from Mr Milhofer, Mr Inman indicated that UEB would shortly identify priorities in this area of work. He recognised the importance of making a realistic appraisal of what could be achieved with the available resource: over-promising and under-delivering would damage the University’s relationship with the community.

Mr Inman elaborated on the opportunities and benefits arising from engaging with the local community, including the creation of employment opportunities for home and international

students, support for local councils and other organisations on carbon reduction, engagement with Wokingham Borough Council to support environmental sustainability in development plans, and consultancy from the range of the University's expertise.

The President noted the increasingly strong relationship between the University and the community, the contribution which the University was making to the local economy and employment, and the further consequent benefits for the University; it was important that these synergies served the interests of all parties. The Council looked forward to further updates in due course.

Resolved:

"That a report on progress under the Community Engagement pillar of the University Strategy, now submitted, be received."

21/51 Report on progress under the Environmental Sustainability pillar of the University Strategy
(Item 8)

The Council received an oral report from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Planning and Resource) (Professor Fellowes) on progress under the Environmental Sustainability pillar of the University Strategy.

Professor Fellowes offered an overview of the global climate and biodiversity crisis, and outlined the University's contribution to addressing some of the key issues and to promoting environmental sustainability.

The University was seeking to be one of the greenest universities in the world and had set itself the aim of being ranked among the top five institutions in the People and Planet league table by 2026 (currently it was placed 28th).

In relation to its operations, the University had set itself a target of achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2030. It had already reduced its carbon footprint by 45% since 2008, which was the largest fall for any UK research intensive university. The University was aiming to reduce its water use by one-third and for less than 1% of its waste to go to landfill. Other dimensions of sustainability included the biodiversity of the campus (which was home to some 2,000 species), its adoption of an ethical investment policy, the introduction of menus for change in its food outlets (which promoted plant-based diets), and the promotion of sustainable means of transport and smart working to reduce the impact of travel to campus.

The University's research on climate change was having a world-leading impact. The University contributed the largest number of scientists from a single institution to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Working Group I (which assessed the physical science of climate change), had the joint highest number among the 1,000 most influential climate change scientists, and was one of the few universities globally to have its own online presence on the COP26 (UN Climate Change Conference) website. The University was home to the Walker Institute and the Institute of Environmental Analytics, two leading research institutes in the field.

In relation to teaching, the University already offered to all its students an optional module on climate change and its implications, and sustainable development was being integrated across the portfolio of programmes in ways appropriate to each discipline. The University had recently held a Climate Education Summit, sponsored by a range of high-profile partners,

which had brought together young people, educators, scientists, and policy-makers to transform the way children are taught about climate change.

Professor Fellowes was currently developing a Sustainability Strategy, which would be presented to Council in due course.

In response to a question from the President, Professor Fellowes acknowledged that the target of net zero by 2030 was stretching, and that, as net emissions were reduced, the achievement of zero became progressively more difficult. He believed that the target was achievable and morally right, and a date of 2030 rather than 2040 ensured greater accountability and drove action.

In response to a question from Mr Milhofer, Professor Fellowes acknowledged the difference in scale between the impact of the University's world-leading research on climate change and the impact of its changes in operational management. He believed that both were intrinsically important, but also important reputationally: if the University did not address its own carbon footprint while producing research on climate change, it would be vulnerable to charges of hypocrisy.

In response to other questions, Professor Fellowes indicated that the University needed to offer a clearer narrative about its work around climate change and environmental sustainability, and ensure that its contribution was more widely recognised. He also spoke of reviewing the orientation of research across a wider range of disciplines, including health, to address the impacts of climate change.

The University Secretary and Chief Strategy Officer undertook to make the presentation slides available to the Council.

Resolved:

"That an oral report on progress under the Environmental Sustainability pillar of the University Strategy, now submitted, be received."

Matters for report

21/52 Report of the Vice-Chancellor (Item 9)

The Council received the Report of the Vice-Chancellor.

The Vice-Chancellor expressed his delight at seeing large numbers of students on campus. He affirmed the University's commitment to ensuring an excellent on-campus experience for its students, academically and also beyond the curriculum, which aligned with students' hopes and expectations.

The Vice-Chancellor reported that:

- (a) the University had received from the University and College Union (UCU) formal notification of a ballot on industrial action and action short of a strike in opposition to the proposed changes to pension arrangements under the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS). It was notable that, in the majority of universities which were members of the USS, ballots were being held not only on the issue of pensions, but also on pay and casual contract arrangements. The restriction of the ballot to the pensions issue at

Reading was testimony to the constructive working relationship which had been established between the University and UCU, which had led to an agreement on pay and improved conditions for casual staff. The University would communicate with staff appropriately to ensure that UCU members were well-placed to make an informed decision in the ballot.

- (b) the small group charged with overseeing the arrangements for the appointment of a new Chancellor had now met on two occasions, and had reviewed the remit of the role and had considered the qualities sought in the appointee. The group would now consult more widely on its proposals, and would then seek to identify suitable candidates. It was intended that the new Chancellor would be installed at the time of the Degree Congregations in Summer 2022.

In response to a question from Mr Beardmore-Gray, the Vice-Chancellor confirmed that the University was committed to providing a face-to-face on-campus experience for students, but also had to accommodate within its provision a substantial number of international students who, for a variety of reasons related to the pandemic, were unable to come to the UK. In this context, the University had to reconcile the interests of on-campus students, those of international students who were participating in their programme remotely, and the efficient use of staff time. The delivery of some teaching sessions on-line was therefore not a matter of staff convenience, but a necessity driven by the University's diverse student body and their different circumstances. For on-campus students, on-line sessions would complement face-to-face delivery. The Vice-Chancellor acknowledged the importance of managing perceptions and communicating effectively on this issue, both to students and the wider public.

In response to a question from the President, the Vice-Chancellor explained that student numbers would continue to be in flux for some weeks, but that it was expected that the final position would be close to target. He would be able to report with reasonable confidence to the next meeting of the Strategy and Finance Committee.

Resolved:

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

21/53 Report on preparation for the Autumn Term (Item 10)

The Council received a Report on preparations for the Autumn Term.

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) (Professor Zaum) outlined the preparations for the Autumn Term, and confirmed that the safety of students and staff was the University's paramount concern. He noted that, after eighteen months when their education and social life had been constrained, students were looking forward to engaging with university life fully and face-to-face. The University was committed to meeting their high expectations. In its planning, the University had tried to create a teaching framework which would apply throughout the Autumn Term and thereby avoid, as far as possible, disruptive changes in their learning experience, which, though inevitable, had caused student discontent last year. The University's approach had taken full account of health and safety guidance, and had been informed by constructive input from a wide range of stakeholders, including the local branch of the University and College Union, Staff Forum, and RUSU. Professor Zaum reported that Welcome Week was under way, many staff were back on campus and were glad to be so, and the campus was beginning, once again, to have a lively, thriving atmosphere.

In response to a question from Professor Gibbins, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education and Student Experience) (Professor McCrum) reported that the University had given careful thought about how best to communicate the arrangements to students and to assure them that the University was doing its utmost to provide an excellent student experience. She explained that the University had moved away from 'You said; we did' campaigns, which had unhelpfully promoted a transactional relationship with students rather than a sense of community and partnership. The University had been considering feedback about its communications during the pandemic, and was now adopting a different approach which would provide clearer, more empathetic messages, less hedged with caveats, which would focus on key themes; students would be signposted to further detail and to information relevant to sub-sets of the student population.

In response to questions, Mr Knowles, RUSU President, reported that students were enjoying Welcome Week, were engaging with clubs and societies at RUSU's Freshers' Fair, and were looking forward to a normal student life.

Resolved:

"That a report on preparation for the Autumn Term, now submitted, be received."

21/54 Update on commercial developments (Item 11)

The Council received an update on commercial developments,

[Section 43]

The President thanked the Chief Financial Officer for her comprehensive explanation of the proposal and the Council for its careful discussion.

Resolved:

"That:

1. [Section 43]
2. [Section 43]
3. An update on commercial developments, now submitted, be received."

21/55 Presentations from two Functions on areas of interest (Item 12)

The Council agreed to defer the presentations until its next meeting.

21/56 Dates of further meetings of the Council in the Session 2021/22

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

Wednesday 24 November 2021 at 10.00am (preceded by an informal meeting the previous evening)
Tuesday 25 January 2022 at 2.15pm
Monday 14 March 2022 at 2.15pm
Monday 4 July 2022 at 2.15pm

The Vice-Chancellor noted that, while most University committees would continue to meet virtually, there would be particular benefit if Council were able to meet in person and hold its annual dinner in November. He would explore this possibility and advise members in due course.