

Academic and Governance Services



Council

17/01 A meeting of the Council was held in Room G01, Chancellor's Building, on Friday 20 January 2017 at 2.15 pm.

The President
The Vice-President (Ms S M Woodman)
The Vice-Chancellor
The Deputy Vice-Chancellor
The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Professor G. Brooks)
The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Mr V. Raimo)
The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Professor R. Van de Noort)

Mr T. Bartlam
Mr T. Beardmore-Grey
Professor J. Board
Professor L. Butler
Mr B. Cooper
Mr K. Corrigan
Mrs P. Egan
Dr P. Erskine
Mrs M. Hargreaves

Dr O.B. Kennedy
Miss P. Oppenheimer
Mrs K. Owen
Mr H.W.A. Palmer
Professor J.R. Park
Mr S.C.C. Pryce
Dr B. Rawal
Professor S.F. Walker

The Chief Strategy Officer and University Secretary

In attendance:

The Chief Financial Officer
The Director of Quality Support and Development

Apologies were received from Lord Crisp, Dame Moira Gibb, and Mr S.P. Sherman.

The President welcomed Mrs M. Hargreaves and Ms S. Foley, Chief Financial Officer, to their first meeting of the Council.

17/02 The minutes (16/54-16/87) of the meeting held on 25 November 2016 were confirmed and signed.

Arising on the Minutes:

Minute 16/69 REDACTED S.43

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Items for note

17/03 Report of the Strategy and Finance Committee (Item 4.1)

The Council received the Report of the meeting of the Strategy and Finance Committee held on 24 November 2016 relating to items for report.

Resolved:

“That the Report of the Strategy and Finance Committee held on 24 November 2016 relating to items for report, now submitted, be received.”

17/04 Documents sealed and to be sealed (Item 4.2)

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."

17/05 Code of Governance Statement on Development and Fundraising (Item 4.3)

The Council received the Code of Governance Statement on Development and Fundraising.

Resolved:

"That the Code of Governance Statement on Development and Fundraising, now submitted, be received."

Main items of business: strategic matters for discussion and decision

17/06 Presentation on Transnational Education by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Global Engagement) (Item 5.1)

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Global Engagement) (Mr Raimo) made a presentation to the Council on transnational education (TNE) (copy inserted in Minute Book).

Mr Raimo gave an overview of the range of the University's TNE activity, including the University's campuses in South Africa and Malaysia, and the joint Academy which the University ran in partnership with Nanjing University of Information Science and Technology (NUIST). He outlined the origins, development and current state of these activities and commented on the drivers for TNE within the broader political and economic contexts.

Henley Business School South Africa (HBSSA) was the oldest UK overseas campus, having been established some 25 years ago, and, following a period of gradual growth, had developed rapidly in recent years and was making a significant contribution to the social and business agenda in South Africa. HBSSA now had just over one thousand alumni and a similar number of current students, and was financially healthy.

The joint Academy with NUIST had developed from a progression agreement and had evolved over some six years to the current position where the Academy had some 300 students across four programmes; two further programmes were in development. The University's costs in relation to the Academy were relatively modest, largely comprising staff time, and revenue directly from the in-country activity was negligible; however, significant revenue was generated from students' transfer to the UK to complete the later Part(s) of their degree and to take postgraduate programmes.

The establishment of the University of Reading Malaysia (UoRM) had been approved by the University Council in 2011/12, had admitted its first students in 2013, and moved to its campus in Educity in 2015. It currently had some 430 students REDACTED S.43 UoRM was also proving a useful conduit for recruitment of Malaysian students to the University's UK programmes.

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The development of TNE arrangements tended to be gradual and not to follow a consistent trajectory; however, the long-term benefits were potentially substantial.

17/07 University of Reading Malaysia (Item 5.2)

The Council received a briefing paper on the University of Reading Malaysia, prepared by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Global Engagement) (Mr Raimo).

The Vice-Chancellor referred to Mr Raimo's presentation and noted that the University (and the UK higher education sector more generally) had been, and would continue to be, affected by demographic change, shifts in government policy across a range of areas, and structural change in the higher education market. There were therefore strong arguments for the University to maintain a broad range of activity and to retain TNE across a number of locations as part of its portfolio. In this context, it was timely for the University to consider the progress achieved by UoRM, its student number projections, financial viability, and forward investment needs. The Vice-Chancellor regretted that it had not been possible to submit a fuller paper on UoRM to this meeting. Mr D.C.L. Savage had been appointed Chief Operating Officer, UoRM, from the beginning of January and was working on a

comprehensive account of the current position for submission to the Strategy and Finance Committee at its meeting on 27 February 2017, and Ms Foley, as the University's new Chief Financial Officer, would provide an analysis of the University's financial relationship with UoRM.

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In response to further questions, Mr Raimo explained that, although its research capacity was currently at an early stage of development, UoRM was eligible to apply for funding from the Malaysian research councils and to engage in research collaborations, and that, on the evidence from other UK campuses in Malaysia, there was a realistic prospect of success in such competitions. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor noted that the University's physical presence in Malaysia provided opportunities to raise the profile of the University and its research, which, in turn, contributed to its reputation and international ranking. The Department of Meteorology had run a CPD programme for the World Meteorological Organisation at the campus, which had strengthened the University's reputation in the region.

Ms Foley confirmed that she would scrutinise the UoRM's financial position closely and would seek external expert advice, as appropriate.

The Council looked forward to receiving a fuller account and having a fuller discussion of these matters at its meeting in March.

The President noted that he had been invited to consider a proposal that a current substantial loan and portion of intercompany funding by the University to UoRM be converted to equity, and he sought the views of Council. He noted some caution among members and a view that the matter might best be considered by the Strategy and Finance Committee at its next meeting. He undertook to consider the matter in the light of fuller information, and to pay due regard to the views of Council members. The Council was content with this course of action.

Resolved:

“That a briefing paper on the University of Reading Malaysia, now submitted, be received.”

Items of report

17/08 Report of the Vice-Chancellor (Item 6)

The Vice-Chancellor:

- (a) reported that Lord Waldegrave had been installed as the Chancellor, in succession to Sir John Madejski, at the Degree Congregations in December, and that Lord Waldegrave would address the University

Court in March, offering his perspective on the policy landscape for higher education. He had also been invited to open the new Chancellor's Building;

- (b) reported that the University was currently finalising the University's statement for the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). The statement, together with a prescribed set of metrics, would be considered by a HEFCE-appointed panel, which would deliver its decisions on the rankings of universities in May 2017;
- (c) reported the University's concern that RUSU had decided to advise students to boycott the National Student Survey (NSS). RUSU was opposed to the link between the TEF and the eligibility of universities to increase student fees, and had taken the position that, unless the University committed to freeze Home/EU student fees at £9,250 for entry cohorts for the next three years, they would recommend students not to complete the NSS. The University Executive Board had decided that it could not accede to this request since it would have a major impact on the resource available for the education of future cohorts of students, and that, given the current political and economic context, higher rates of inflation might significantly erode the value of the current fee level over the relevant period. Moreover, the University had already decided, as a matter of principle, that it would not increase the fee for students for the duration of their registration on a programme, which was a more liberal position than many other universities in its peer group; in consequence, a commitment to freeze the fee for three entry cohorts would impact on the resource available to the University for a period of six years. The University was concerned that the boycott of the NSS would compromise the reliability of the NSS, which would impair its usefulness as the basis for enhancing the student experience and would potentially adversely affect the University's performance in the TEF from 2018 onwards. The University had communicated directly to all students the value of the NSS and the University's concerns about the proposed boycott. Students would individually decide their course of action, and the effectiveness of the boycott was difficult to predict.

Mr Cooper, as President of RUSU, explained RUSU's agreed position. He stated that RUSU believed that freezing Home/EU student fees at £9,250 was in the best interests of students and that a boycott of the NSS to support this cause was reasonable. He expressed appreciation of the generally excellent relationships between RUSU and the University, and affirmed RUSU's continuing commitment to constructive dialogue with the University. Miss Oppenheimer stated that the boycott had been mandated by the RUSU membership and reflected the strength of opinion on this issue among the student body.

Lay members of the Council strongly supported the University's decision not to freeze student fees, and expressed disappointment that RUSU had recommended a course of action which was damaging to the University and its students, depriving the University of important feedback which would allow it to respond to students' concerns and compromise its ranking in the TEF and in league tables. Ms Woodman

expressed the hope that there might still be an opportunity for RUSU to reconsider its stance.

The President thanked Mr Cooper and Miss Oppenheimer for their clear representation of RUSU's position;

- (d) commented on the difficulty of determining the likely implications of Brexit for higher education, given the limited information available. The Prime Minister's recent speech on Brexit had included brief reference to science research funding and other policy announcements suggested that there might be provision for additional places to study medicine and allied subjects;
- (e) noted the completion of the Chancellor's Building, and reported on the good progress of the Gateway Building on the Thames Valley Science Park (TVSP), REDACTED S.43;
- (f) referred the Council to a report on Major Projects, which indicated that there were no projects at serious risk of non-delivery, although the combined impact of the projects was challenging for the University Executive Board and the University more generally;
- (g) referred the Council to a report on the Institutional Strategic Key Performance Indicators. He noted that progress was currently mixed, and action was being taken to address those areas where progress was less satisfactory. A staff survey, which would address the Staff Engagement KPI, would be held shortly.

Resolved:

“That:

- (a) a report on Major Projects, now submitted, be received;
- (b) a report on Institutional Strategy Key Performance Indicators, now submitted, be received;
- (c) the Report of the Vice-Chancellor, now submitted, be approved.”

17/09 Update on Enrolments for 2016 and Admissions for 2017-18 (Item 7)

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Planning and Resource) (Professor Van de Noort) reported that, as of the UCAS deadline for submission of applications (20 January), the University had received some REDACTED S. 43 applications for undergraduate programmes, which represented REDACTED S.43 relative to the previous year which compared with a decrease of 5% for the sector overall. There was REDACTED S.43 against a sector decrease of 7%. It appeared that an increasing number of applications were being received after the deadline, so that it was anticipated that there would be some further increase in applications. If the University maintained its quality threshold at the same level as last year, the projected outcome fell within a range REDACTED S.43

against target. The University's efforts were now directed towards converting applications into Firm acceptances. REDACTED S.43

Professor Van de Noort reported that applications for postgraduate taught programmes had REDACTED S.43 relative to the previous year, with some REDACTED S.43 applications having been received. However, the postgraduate application process was unregulated and it was not possible to predict eventual enrolments on the basis of applications. Some REDACTED S.43 applications for postgraduate research places had been received, which represented REDACTED S.43. REDACTED S.43.

17/10 Electronic Management of Assessment (Item 8)

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) (Professor Brooks) reported that the Strategy and Finance Committee had approved the Electronic Management of Assessment Programme REDACTED S.43. The programme would improve the assessment experience for students and staff, and would also reduce the administrative burden associated with assessment thereby achieving benefits identified in the Efficiency and Effectiveness Programme. Professor Brooks indicated that there was a strong desire among students, academics and support staff for the facilities offered by the programme; equally, however, the University recognised that a large change programme involved a period of adjustment and it would work to support staff and students to adapt to new practices. The programme would run for a period of three years, and some benefits would be realised from September 2017.

The Council welcomed the programme.

17/11 Report of the Senate (Item 9)

The Council received the Report of the meeting of the Senate held on 30 November 2016.

The Council welcomed the review of Senate in the light of the recent major changes in the internal and external environment, and affirmed the importance of effective arrangements for the Senate to report to the Council on the student learning experience and academic standards.

Resolved:

“That the Report of the meeting of the Senate held on 30 November 2016, now submitted, be approved.”

Items for approval

17/12 Library request for increase of budget (Item 10)

The Council received a paper on the progress of the Library Refurbishment Project, which included a request for an increase of £4.5m in the project budget. Professor Van de Noort reported that the estimated costs for the

project had increased due to a number of factors, including the discovery of more extensive use of asbestos than originally identified, market changes due to Brexit, and increase in prices due to the weakening of sterling. While this combination of factors had raised the estimated cost from £40m to nearly £50m, it had been possible through a rigorous value engineering exercise to mitigate the increase to £4.5m. The project had originally been planned in discontinuous phases to avoid major activity during the University's 'quiet periods' around the major examination seasons. The listing of the URS Building and the consequent delay in its refurbishment meant that student learning space currently provided in the Library could now be decanted to the vacant URS Building, and, in consequence, the work in the Library could continue uninterrupted through the quiet periods. The rescheduling of the Library refurbishment, with its earlier completion date, achieved major savings which substantially offset the additional costs. Professor Van de Noort informed the Committee that the financial risk associated with failure to deliver the project on schedule and within budget now lay with the construction companies.

Mr Cooper, as President of RUSU, welcomed the rescheduling of the Library refurbishment, which would mean that students would benefit from the new facilities from an earlier date. He urged that consideration be given to the use of the lecture theatres in the URS Building to relieve the pressure on the timetable.

The President noted that the normal contingency provision for refurbishment projects might usefully be reviewed, given the greater risk of unforeseen costs for such projects.

In response to a question from Mr Beardmore-Gray, the Vice-Chancellor agreed to provide the Strategy and Finance Committee and the Council at their next meetings with a projection of the University's cashflow over the next several years in the light of the changes to the schedules for the Library and URS Building refurbishments.

In response to a question from Mr Corrigan, Professor Van de Noort confirmed that the University was mindful of the potentially inflationary consequences of Brexit and would be evaluating the implications across the range of its major projects.

Resolved:

“That:

- (a) a revised budget of £44.5m for the Library refurbishment project, representing an increase of £4.5m on the original budget, be approved;
- (b) a paper on the progress of the Library Refurbishment Project, now submitted, be received.”

The Council received the Anti-Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement 2015/16. Following comments from Mr Palmer, the Council agreed that references to 'modern slavery' be amended to 'slavery', as appropriate.

Resolved:

“That the Anti-Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement 2015/16 Statement, now submitted, be approved, subject to the amendment of references to 'modern slavery'.”

17/14 Dates of further meetings of the Council in the Session 2016/17

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

Monday 20 March 2017 at 2.15pm

Monday 10 July 2017 at 2.15pm