

Council

18/01 A meeting of the Council was held in Carrington 201, Whiteknights Campus, on Thursday 25 January 2018 at 2.15 pm.

The President
The Vice-President (Mrs K. Owen)
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. Beardmore-Grey
Professor L. Butler
Lord Crisp
Mrs P. Egan
Dr P. Erskine
Professor C.L. Furneaux

Miss R. Lennon
Dr B. Rawal
Mr S.P. Sherman
Mr T. Spencer
Professor S.F. Walker
Ms S.M. Woodman

The Chief Strategy Officer and University Secretary

In attendance:

The Chief Financial Officer
The Director of Quality Support and Development
The Dean of Diversity and Inclusion (Professor S.N. Chandler-Wilde)
(for Minute 18/06 only)

Apologies were received from Professor J. Board, Mr K. Corrigan, Mr R.E.R. Evans, Ms H. Gordon, Ms M. Hargreaves, Professor J.R. Park, Mr S.C.C. Pryce, and Mrs S.L. Webber.

18/02 The minutes (17/52-17/78) of the meeting held on 29 November 2017 were confirmed and signed.

Items for note

18/03 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 matters for discussion and decision

18/04 Student experience: update from RUSU (Item 5.1)

The Council received an oral update on the student experience from Mr Spencer, RUSU President, and Miss Lennon, RUSU Welfare Officer.

Mr Spencer reported that no major issues had arisen since the previous meeting, except that, at the end of the Autumn Term, a petition about the lack of study space as a consequence of the Library refurbishment had attracted some 2000 signatures. In response, Mr Spencer and the Vice-Chancellor had met with the proposer of the petition, who was satisfied with the measures being taken to address the issues. The petition had been initiated at the peak of the coursework submission period, and Mr Spencer indicated that further measures might be necessary during the peak submission period in the Spring Term and during the examination period. Mr Spencer reported that issues around the library refurbishment, the lack of study space, and the pressure on teaching space continued to be a significant concern for students and could adversely affect the University's NSS results.

Mr Spencer reminded Council that RUSU's top priorities for the academic year were: student engagement; accommodation; facilities; health; and the interrelated issues of inclusion, diversity, education, accessibility, and unity (encapsulated in the acronym IDEA+).

Miss Lennon spoke of the co-operation between RUSU and the University on a range of initiatives, including LGBT+ History Month and a landlord accreditation scheme in association with Reading Borough Council. She also reported that The Tab, a leading newspaper for students, in a survey of mental health in universities, had ranked the University top for spending on mental health, but significantly lower for student satisfaction with the provision. She indicated that an increasing number of students were seeking counselling outwith the University, in part due to the pressures on the University's well-being services. She welcomed the proposed changes in the personal tutorial system, which would enable academic staff to focus on providing academic support for students, while non-academic support would be provided by professional services.

Miss Lennon referred to the value of extra-curricular activities for students' personal development and their future careers, and to the Sports Management Committee's commitment both to high levels of participation and to the development of elite sports. She reported that, in addition to rowing, the University had high-performing hockey and rugby teams, but their ability to develop further was limited by a lack of resource for top-class coaching. Further investment to support a broader range of sports at the highest level would be welcomed.

Mr Spencer reported that students appreciated the University's provision of a £1m capital fund for the student experience, which had been prioritised by the RUSU

officers. The selected projects included personal learning capture, an extension to The Study, a 4G Pitch, and a RUSU App, and all were now progressing.

In response to questions from lay members, the Vice-Chancellor acknowledged the difficulties arising from the refurbishment of the Library and explained that, in response, the University had increased the amount of study space available to students and had improved communications about the location and availability of study spaces. Professor Van de Noort reported that the Library refurbishment was progressing well, and, provided that no more asbestos was identified, the ground and first floor would be completed by September 2018 and the remainder of the building in the course of the following year.

In response to a question from Lord Crisp, Professor Furneaux outlined some recent developments in the University's pastoral care for students, including an increase in the counselling provision, a greater focus on developing students' resilience, administrative efficiencies which released resource for front-line support, and a major revision of the personal tutoring system. Mrs Owen indicated that student well-being would be the focus of the forthcoming meeting of the Student Experience Committee.

In response to a question from Ms Egan, Miss Lennon confirmed that RUSU and the University recognised the value of volunteering both to the community and to the volunteers and actively promoted volunteering.

In response to a question from Ms Woodman, Mr Raimo explained that the University had excellent sports facilities, which compared well with other universities, except those institutions which ran elite sports programmes as part of their academic portfolio. Given the constraints on resource, there was a tension between investment in the development of elite sports and promotion of wide participation. Mr Raimo indicated that, at present, he inclined towards prioritising the latter, and he hoped that participation targets for students, staff and the community would shortly be introduced.

18/05 Presentation by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) on TEF and improving the student experience (Item 5.2)

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) (Professor Brooks) made a presentation to the Council on TEF and improving the student experience (copy inserted in Minute Book).

Professor Brooks gave an overview of the government's Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF), the University's teaching and learning strategy for 2018-21, and the University's work to enhance the student experience. He outlined the criteria for the TEF award and forthcoming changes, and offered a brief analysis of the characteristics of those institutions which had achieved a Gold award. The University had achieved a Silver award in 2017 (which had been consistent with the profile of the University's metrics) and was working to achieve a Gold award in the future. The University was finalising a new Teaching and Learning Strategy for the period 2018-21, which would support this aspiration. The new strategy focussed on the implementation of the Curriculum Framework, which provided the basis for renewing curricula for all undergraduate programmes,

and on the improvement of the student experience, including enhancing employability and transforming the personal tutorial system. He referred to the University's challenges in relation to teaching and learning, and commented on actions being taken to address them.

In response to a question from Lord Crisp, Professor Brooks indicated that the introduction of the TEF had established greater parity between teaching and research in the sector, and had helped to refocus attention in many institutions on providing a high-quality student experience. At Reading, the principle of parity of esteem between teaching and research had already been affirmed and given practical expression through, for example, revised promotion criteria for academic staff. Schools and academic staff were engaging well with the Curriculum Framework and other initiatives to enhance teaching and learning, and were keen to understand the TEF and its implications for their Schools.

In response to a question from Dr Erskine, Professor Brooks explained that the gold, silver and bronze awards had each been distributed across the different types of institution in the sector, from small new providers to Russell Group universities. He noted that small monotronics, which were sharply focussed on the excellent delivery of a few programmes in a single discipline, had often performed well, and that universities with a broad portfolio were often challenged to maintain consistent excellence across their diverse programmes. The Vice-Chancellor noted that the range of provision in broad-based institutions may come under increasing pressure in such an environment, and that there may also be greater differentiation between teaching and research missions in different parts of an institution.

In response to a question from Dr Rawal, Professor Brooks spoke of the importance of engaging students as partners and co-creators in teaching and learning, and outlined some of the challenges in securing the participation of a diverse range of students in the development of programmes. Mr Spencer advised that promoting student engagement was a sector-wide issue, and that RUSU and the University worked closely together on this issue.

18/06 Presentation by a Dean of Diversity and Inclusion (Item 6.1)

Professor Chandler-Wilde, Dean of Diversity and Inclusion, made a presentation to the Council on progress on diversity and inclusion (copy inserted in Minute Book).

Professor Chandler-Wilde referred to the drivers for the University's action on diversity and inclusion, and explained the rationale for prioritising gender, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation (particularly in relation to staff), and disability (particularly in relation to students). The University had set well-defined targets in each of the priority areas, with gender-based targets for professorial staff and for membership of key committees, targets for declaration of sexuality and for the ranking in the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index, and targets for race and ethnicity for the composition of staff and committee membership. Professor Chandler-Wilde acknowledged that there was a need for substantial improvement in these areas, and indicated the range of work being undertaken to deliver the University's ambitions. He

reported that the University was working to achieve recognition from Athena SWAN, Stonewall, and the Race Equality Charter Mark. He expressed appreciation of the commitment of the University Executive Board and the Council to diversity and inclusion and their support for this work.

In response to questions from Ms Egan and Dr Rawal, the President affirmed his commitment to enhancing the diversity of the Council. He welcomed the progress made over the past couple of years, and acknowledged that further work was required. The Chief Strategy Officer and University Secretary indicated that the public advertisement of vacancies on Council had attracted highly qualified applicants from a wider range of backgrounds, and that this approach would be adopted in future when there were a number of vacancies to fill; however, it had been felt that the resource required for such an exercise was disproportionate when filling a single vacancy. The President, being mindful of CUC guidance, hoped that the Council might reduce in size, and, if this were the case, there would be fewer vacancies. In the context of a smaller membership and with the purpose of allowing Council to become more diverse more quickly, there might be merit in reducing the maximum period for membership of Council from three terms to two.

In response to questions from lay members, Professor Chandler-Wilde noted that the proportion of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) University staff was less than the proportion of BAME students, and there was some evidence that this negatively impacted the BAME student experience. More generally, staff and student surveys indicated that small numbers of BAME staff and students felt uneasy about aspects of life on the campus. This issue was being actively addressed in the context of the University's work towards the Race Equality Charter mark.

Items of report

18/07 Report of the Vice-Chancellor (Item 7)

The Vice-Chancellor:

- (a) reported that he had initiated a newsletter, circulated periodically to members of Council, to share current issues in relation to higher education. He hoped that these briefings would prove useful;
- (b) spoke of recent changes in the higher education landscape, including: the appointment of a new Secretary State for Education and a new Minister for Higher Education (who, prior to his appointment, had accepted an invitation to visit the University in February); a prospective review of funding for tertiary education; the creation of the Office for Students, which would formally assume its responsibilities in April 2018; the continuing interest of the OfS, politicians and the media in vice-chancellors' pay and the effectiveness of universities' governance structures. The Vice-Chancellor reported that the Remuneration Committee would be revisiting issues around senior pay and governance shortly;

- (c) reported that the University had recently completed its financial and academic planning round. The freeze in tuition fees, the inexorable rise in costs, and uncertainties about regulatory demands meant that the exercise was subject to tight financial constraints. A report would be submitted to Council at its next meeting;
- (d) reported that the Joint Negotiating Committee of the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS), which comprised equal membership from the employers and trades union, had decided, on the casting vote of the independent chair, to change the basis of the scheme from defined benefits to defined contribution. The University and College Union (UCU) had balloted its members on the issue and had won a strong mandate for strikes and other industrial action. UCU had announced a rolling programme of strikes, with the first to be held in February, and action short of a strike. The Vice-Chancellor anticipated that, given the nature of the issue and the response to the ballot, participation in the strike would be greater than on previous occasions. The University had been preparing contingency plans to mitigate the impact of industrial action, which would be reported to the Council at its next meeting, and information would be provided to students;
- (e) drew the Council's attention to the regular reports on strategic projects and on the University's key performance indicators, and proposed that Council receive a presentation on both at its meeting in July 2018.

In response to a question from Dr Erskine, Professor Van de Noort confirmed that, given the growth in student numbers in Henley Business School (HBS), space was being reallocated to enable additional HBS staff to be accommodated adjacent to the HBS building. He reminded the Council that its informal discussion last term had identified student experience across the University as a priority for the ten-year capital programme, which implied that HBS, while important and while benefitting from a University-wide improvement in the student experience, would not be an absolute priority. There would, however, be further discussion of the proposed ten-year capital programme, which would allow consideration of the relative priority of space for HBS.

In response to a question from Mr Spencer, the Vice-Chancellor reported that some 460 UCU members at the University had voted in favour of a strike, and that it was reasonable to assume that a strike would have a significant impact here, as elsewhere in the sector. He affirmed the University's commitment to minimise disruption to students, as far as feasible, and to ensure that finalists graduated in the summer and that non-finalists were able progress. The University Executive Board and University Board for Teaching and Learning would be discussing contingency plans shortly and there would naturally be opportunity for RUSU officers to contribute to their development.

In response to a further question from Mr Spencer, the Vice-Chancellor confirmed that the post-project review of the Efficiency and Effectiveness Programme would be undertaken shortly, and that RUSU and UCU would have an opportunity to inform the review.

Resolved:

“That:

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

18/08 Update on University of Reading Malaysia (Item 8)

The Council received a report from the Vice-Chancellor on the University of Reading Malaysia (UoRM).

The Vice-Chancellor reported on the visit to Malaysia which he, together with Mr Raimo and the Chief Financial Officer, had undertaken the previous week, and provided an update on developments since the paper had been prepared. [Redacted, Section 43].

In response to a question from Dr Erskine, the Vice-Chancellor acknowledged the potential risk that negotiations would yield short-term benefits or only meet Council’s financial criteria by a small margin without addressing fundamental issues which could re-emerge at a later date; the University was alert to the risk and would ensure that any solution was sustainable in the long term. In response to further questions from lay members, the Vice-Chancellor indicated that he expected the future financial position to become clearer within about three weeks and noted that the Council, at its meeting in November 2017, had authorised the President and Vice-Presidents together to assess whether proposed arrangements were within the financial limits specified by the Council and, if appropriate, to sign an agreement with IIB. The Vice-Chancellor assured the Council that the situation would not be allowed to drift.

In response to a question from Ms Woodman, Mr Raimo confirmed that the Provost-elect was fully aware of the Council’s discussions and decision, and reported that he had formally accepted the post, was developing his understanding of UoRM, and was engaging with the Vice-Chancellor, Mr Raimo and others.

[Redacted, Section 43].

Resolved:

“That an update report on the University of Reading Malaysia, now submitted, be approved.”

18/09 Update on Admissions for 2018-19 (Item 9)

The Council received an oral report from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Planning and Resource) (Professor Van de Noort) on admissions for 2018-19.

Professor Van de Noort reported that by 15 January 2018, which was the formal deadline for applications to UCAS, undergraduate applications to the

University had fallen [redacted, section 43] relative to the previous year. He noted a number of contributory factors, including: a demographic decline of 2% in the cohort of school-leavers; Brexit, which appeared to have led to a reduction not only in EU applicants, but also in international students who perceived the UK as less hospitable than previously; and changing behaviours among applicants, who increasingly applied later in the cycle. He indicated that applications to the University's key competitors (i.e. those universities which most commonly appeared in the same applications as Reading) had declined by 9.25%. There was no evidence to suggest that universities which had been rated Silver in the TEF had suffered worse declines in applications than those rated Gold. Professor Van de Noort explained that the University was working hard to ensure a high conversion rate from the smaller pool of applicants. He expected that the University would recruit to target, but that there would be a decline in the prior attainment of entrants.

Professor Van de Noort also reported a [redacted, section 43] decrease in applications to postgraduate taught programmes to date and [redacted, section 43] decrease in applications to postgraduate research programmes. He noted that the number of applications to postgraduate research programmes was a poor indicator of eventual recruitment, and he remained reasonably optimistic that the targets would be achieved.

In response to questions from Ms Woodman and Dr Erskine, Professor Van de Noort explained the challenges around ensuring sufficient numbers of entrants while maintaining the academic quality of the entry cohort. The financial implications of failing to meet the recruitment target were significant, and, in consequence, careful consideration was given, having due regard to the discipline and the profile of prior attainment, to how far the admissions requirements might be relaxed. The University had developed a number of initiatives to improve recruitment while maintaining the quality of entrants: the University had introduced a Science Foundation Year for talented students who had, for various reasons, not taken science A levels, but wished to pursue a science degree; the University's partnership with Cambridge Education Group provided foundation programmes which led to admission to a range of the University's programmes; [redacted, section 4]. Mr Raimo reported that the creation of further, non-traditional channels for entry, including collaborations with international partners, was proving successful and had contributed to a record number of international undergraduate admissions last year.

In response to a question, Professor Van de Noort explained that the University had a good record of admitting students from disadvantaged groups and that, in consequence, it had not introduced a contextualised admissions process, which took explicit account of an applicant's social background.

18/10 Report of the Strategy and Finance Committee (Item 10)

The Council received the Report of the meeting of the Strategy and Finance Committee held on 12 January 2018.

In respect of the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF), Professor Van de Noort reported that the University, ECMWF, and

the Department for Business, Education and Industrial Strategy had had positive discussions about ways of working together in relation to ECMWF's proposed relocation.

Professor Van de Noort reported that the University and UPP had made good progress towards a financial agreement in relation to the redevelopment of St Patrick's Hall. Reading Borough Council's planning officials had confirmed that the planning application had met the requirements of the Council's planning guidance, and the application would be considered by the Planning Committee on 7 February 2018. There had, however, been 67 objections to the application, mainly in relation to potential disruption to local residents. In response to a question from Mr Spencer, Professor Van de Noort indicated that, if the Council declined the application, the University would need to consider whether to appeal the decision, given the pressing need for student accommodation. In response to a question from Mr Beardmore-Grey, Professor Van de Noort confirmed that the University had reserved 500 rooms at Kendrick Hall, a student residence owned by Unite, for 2018/19, and was therefore well-placed to meet the demand for accommodation if the University met its recruitment target.

The Council noted that the Strategy and Finance Committee had agreed, in principle, that plans be developed for the extension of Bridges Hall.

Resolved:

“That the Report of the meeting of the Strategy and Finance Committee held on 12 January 2017, now submitted, be approved.”

18/11 Effectiveness of Council (Item 11)

The President reported that a review of the effectiveness of the Council would be undertaken shortly, having regard *inter alia* to its structure, membership, organisation, conduct of business, members' participation, and the support to members in fulfilling their remits. Members would be invited to complete a survey, and Ms Owen would seek members' views on the President's leadership of Council. The Appointments and Governance Committee would consider, in the light of the responses, the effectiveness of Council and develop any recommendations for its improvement, with a view to reporting to the Council at its meeting in March.

18/12 Dates of further meetings of the Council in the Session 2017/18

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

Monday 19 March 2018, 2.15pm

Monday 9 July 2018, 2.15pm