

Academic and Governance Services

Council

21/57 A meeting of the Council was held online on Wednesday 24 November 2021 at 10.00 am.

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

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

In attendance:

- The Chief Strategy Officer and University Secretary
- The Chief Financial Officer
- The Director of Quality Support and Development
- Mr J. Jack, Senior Technician-Research and Teaching, Technical Services (for Minute 21/67 only)
- Professor A. Charlton-Perez, Head of School, Mathematical, Physical and Computational Sciences (for Minute 21/68 only)

Apologies were received from Ms S. Maple, Mrs S. Plank, Mr S.C.C. Pryce, Mr N. Richards and Professor Parveen Yaqoob. The Council noted that the absences meant that the Council did not have a lay majority in the room; as a result, missing lay members had for their part approved the recommendations, as set out in the resolutions, ahead of the meeting by circulation.

21/58 The minutes (21/44-21/56) of the meeting held on 23 September 2021 were confirmed and signed.

Items for note

21/59 Membership and Terms of Reference (Item 4.1)

The Council received a statement of its Membership and Terms of Reference.

Mr Jack explained that Technical Services comprised 120 technicians, who were specialists in the practical support of teaching and research in sciences and the arts, including professional health and safety co-ordinators; they were located across the London Road and Whiteknights campuses and the University farms. They supported some 2,000 practical class

Professor Charlton-Perez referred to the prominence of the 'climate stripes' around the conference and its reporting, including every BBC COP story; the stripes had been developed by Professor Ed Hawkins, Professor of Climate Science, as a graphic representation of climate change. Professor Charlton-Perez spoke of the University's involvement

- (b) **Relocating Art and clearing space for the ECMWF Building.** Under the proposal, the School of Art would relocate to the former central kitchen, which would be augmented with an extension.
- (c) **Research synergies.** In order to strengthen the bid, the University was proposing to invest £30m over 15 years in a programme of climate and weather research (including related work on high performance computing, machine learning, and artificial intelligence) to be determined in discussion with ECMWF. Collaboration with ECMWF would offer a complete research eco-system, including blue sky, applied and operational research, including commercially oriented research which would leverage private funding.

Professor Frazier reported that the Senate had given careful consideration to the business case for the relocation of ECMWF and had strongly supported the proposal. The Senate was naturally concerned that the arrangements for the relocation of the School of Art should support the School's activities and deliver an improved student experience. The Vice-Chancellor reported that the University and College Union (UCU) and the Staff Forum had been consulted on the proposals since the complete package of interrelated proposals exceeded the £10m threshold which triggered formal consultation. The University had agreed to have further discussions with UCU in relation to the relocation of Art. The Staff Forum had supported the proposals.

In response to questions, Professor Zaum indicated that the Comprehensive Spending Review had been more generous to science research than had initially been anticipated and appeared to represent a significant shift in governmental thinking in relation to research and development. There was strong encouragement to develop industry-academic collaborations.

In response to a question from Mrs Butler, the Vice-Chancellor confirmed that the University was maximising the opportunities offered by COP26 to promote the University's climate research and its further development. The University had engaged closely with government and the international community. He noted that Mr Alok Sharma, President of COP26, was the MP for Reading West. While the University enjoyed a strong relationship with Mr Sharma as a local MP, Mr Sharma, in his capacity as President of COP26, had been careful to avoid any possible conflict of interest and had directed COP-related engagement with the University through the official channels.

In response to a question from Professor Kambhampati, Professor Zaum explained that ECMWF's Copernicus activity was based in Bonn (and to a lesser extent in Helsinki) and its computing facilities were based in Bologna.

[Section 43] however, it was possible that a number of countries might press for delay given the current uncertainties in the UK's relationship with Europe. Professor Zaum noted that the proposal enjoyed strong support from the UK government, including the Chief Scientific Officer, and hoped that this would provide assurance to the ECMWF Council.

Resolved:

"That the business case for investment in the relocation of ECMWF to the University of Reading in a programme of collaborative weather and climate research be approved."

21/70 Report of the Student Experience Committee (Item 8)

The Council received the Report of the meeting of the Student Experience Committee held on 4 November 2021.

Mrs Owen, as Chair of the Committee, referred to the University's work to address sexual harassment and misconduct, RUSU's action to guard against the risk of drink-spiking, the progress of the Portfolio Review, and the disappointing outcome of the National Student Survey (NSS) 2021.

Miss Loweth, RUSU Welfare Officer, reported that, while students had been concerned about drink-spiking and a number of cases had been reported, there had not been any confirmed cases in RUSU's events and venues. RUSU had already had in place measures against drink-spiking and had intensified them following media reports of a rising incidence; there had been some adverse comments on social media about increased checks before admission to the 365 nightclub. Mr Knowles, RUSU President, reported that Matt Rodda, MP for Reading East, had met with RUSU to consult on actions which might be taken to address the issue nationally and had continued the conversation.

[Section 40] RUSU was conducting a review of the officer roles, which inter alia would consider whether responsibilities currently associated with the Diversity brief would be more appropriately integrated into other roles on a permanent basis and would also consider the rationale for the role of President.

Mr Knowles spoke of his work to develop a 'people's fair' to create networking opportunities to support students' employability and the successful introduction of a late-night bus service from RUSU to improve student safety and wellbeing.

reported incidents was probably due to increased reporting rather than an actual increase in incidents. The University Secretary and Chief Strategy Officer advised that the Office for Students would require, as part of

Notwithstanding the delay in receipt of the external auditor's report, the Council was content to authorise the Vice-Chancellor or Chief Financial Officer to sign at this point the letters of support for the University's subsidiary companies, and to note and approve the financial statements (subject to the amendment indicated above) and audit report. If, in the light of the external auditor's report, any material changes-

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The Vice-Chancellor advised that his next all-staff briefing on 1 December would focus on the work of Council and would include a conversation with the President, Mrs Owen, Mrs Gordon, Professor Gibbins, and Mr Magee about their roles, Council's responsibilities, and some examples of the issues they considered and the decisions they made.

The Vice-Chancellor reported that the University and College Union nationally had announced industrial action comprising three days of strikes (1, 2 and 3 December) and ongoing action short of a strike, which, at the moment, was limited to working to contract and not undertaking voluntary activities. The scope of the dispute nationally included issues around pay, casualisation, workloads and pensions, but Reading was one of three universities where the dispute related to pensions only. The industrial action was very regrettable, particularly in view of the past 18 months and its impact on the student experience. The University had established a Contingency Operations Group, which was co-ordinating measures to minimise the impact of the industrial action on students; as was the case with previous industrial action, the University was concerned to fulfil its obligations to students, to respect the right of colleagues to withdraw their labour, and to ensure a full and fast recovery following the industrial action. The Vice-Chancellor advised that the UUK's constituent institutions were unanimous in their view that a substantial increase in pension contributions was unsustainable for both institutions and individuals and would have far reaching consequences, and they were firm in their resolve to maintain this position. The Vice-Chancellor indicated that the industrial action was expected to have a variable impact across Schools, given variations in union membership across the University and in the views of individual members. The Council endorsed the University's approach and its commitment to deliver the best possible student experience in the circumstances.

In relation to the key performance indicators supporting the University Strategy, the Vice-Chancellor noted that good progress was being made in some areas, other areas were disappointing (in part due to pandemic-related factors), and in some cases the necessary comparative data was not available.

Resolved:

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

21/74 Report of the Strategy and Finance Committee (Item 12)

The Council received the Report of the meetings of the Strategy and Finance Committee held on 18 October and 11 November 2021.

The President reported that, on the basis of definitive enrolment data, the University had very nearly met its recruitment target and that, due to the profile of the student intake and improved continuation rates, had exceeded its revenue target by £1.6m. The Council thanked the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Planning and Resource) and relevant colleagues for their work to achieve this outcome.

[Section 43]

1. "That the Report of the meetings of the Strategy and Finance Committee, held on 18 October and 11 November 2021, now submitted, be approved."

21/75 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 18 October 2021.

The President reminded the Council that, as part of the review of the effectiveness of Council with reference to the CUC Code, it had been proposed to undertake a deeper analysis of the skill set of lay members. This work would be incorporated into the annual appraisal of Council members with the Vice-Presidents. The Committee was mindful that the closer involvement of Council members in projects could potentially give rise to a conflict between executive and governance responsibilities, and that judgement would be required in relation to the occasions and nature of Council members' engagement with specific projects.

The Council noted recent changes in the reporting requirements in relation to Prevent.

