

Council

24/39 A meeting of the Council was held on Monday 01 July 2024 at 2pm in Room 201 Carrington Building, Whiteknights.

Present:	The President	(in the Chair)
	The Vice Presidents	(Mr K. Corrigan and Mrs K. Owen)
	The Vice-Chancellor	
	The Deputy-Vice-Chancellor	
	The Pro-Vice-Chancellor	(Dr C Baylon)
	The Pro-Vice-Chancellor	(Professor E. McCrum)
	The Pro-Vice-Chancellor	(Professor D. Zaum)

Mr S. Alexander	Mr J. Jack
Mr S. Ali	Mr A. McCallum
Professor E. Beleska- Spasova	Mr P. Milhofer
Mrs P. Egan	Mrs S. Plank
Professor R. Frazier	Mr N. Richards
Mr S.Gandhi	Dr C. Shaw
Professor J. Gibbins	Professor K. Strohfeltd
Mr J. Haxell	Dr J. Young

In attendance:

The Chief Strategy Officer and University Secretary
The Director of Finance
Mrs E Murphy-Boyce (minute secretary)

Apologies had been received from Mrs S. Butler and Mrs S. Maple.

The members of Council received a tour of the new Art Building by Professor Russell, Head of Reading School of Art, and a talk about the construction of the building from Mr Casselden, the Director of Estates, prior to the start of the meeting.

24/40 President's opening remarks

The President:

- Thanked colleagues who had organised for Council members to view the new Art Building earlier in the day, in particular Professor Russell and Mr Casselden;
- Welcomed Mr Haxell, RSU President, and Mr Gandhi, RSU Education Officer, to their first meeting of Council and thanked them for their early engagement with matters of Council;
- Welcomed Mrs Murphy-Boyce into the role of Minute Secretary;
- Noted that this would be Mr Richards' last meeting of Council as he was stepping down as a Council member. The President thanked Mr Richards for all his hard work since he joined Council in 2019, including as Chair of Audit Committee and member of Scrutiny

and Finance Committee. The President noted that Mr Richards would be much missed and the Council wished him the best for the future.

- Noted that Mrs Egan would be stepping down from Council at the end of the calendar year;
- Noted that the quality of the candidates who had applied to become new members of Council was very high which was very encouraging;
- Congratulated Professor Stainthorp from the University's Institute of Education on her OEB for services to education, awarded in the Kings Birthday Honours.

24/41 Vice-Chancellor's opening remarks

The Vice-Chancellor:

- Noted the current political context with a general election taking place imminently;
- Referred to the Office for Students' Report on Financial Sustainability in the Higher Education Sector, which indicated an over-dependency on international student numbers and growth in home student numbers across the sector, and that some universities may not be sustainable long term. The Vice-Chancellor noted that the report did not take into account the variation amongst UK universities and further that cumulative over-prediction of student numbers had been a known issue in the sector (and indeed part of annual HEFCE and latterly OfS reporting) for over 10 years;
- Referred to the Migration Advisory Group report, and reported that it found no evidence of misuse of the graduate 2-year work visa, which was positive news for the sector.
- Noted that the manifestos of both the Conservative Party and the Labour Party lacked much detail regarding Higher Education, though the Conservative Party had promised to close down 'poor quality degrees'. The Vice-Chancellor noted that the Labour Party had acknowledged that the current financing of degree programmes needed change but had not included any proposed solutions in their manifesto, nor did they include proposals to increase student maintenance loans;
- Noted that during conversations with the shadow education secretary, Bridgit Phillipson, it was apparent that investment in Early Years, SEND provision and schools in general was considered more important than Higher Education, at least in the short term;
- Noted that the general outlook in the Higher Education Sector remained bleak, with some 60 universities in the UK undertaking larger-scale redundancy programmes. The Vice-Chancellor noted that prospective students' perception of such action was potentially that these universities were 'failing' and that they could be put off from applying as a result;
- Noted that, notwithstanding his comments regarding the general state of the sector, the University's own financial situation was relatively positive, and becoming more stable with inflation, salary uplifts and utilities more or less back to normal. He further noted that as a result of the USS pension scheme now in surplus, an area of high volatility and risk had been removed from the University accounts.
- Referred to item 5.1 of the Agenda (the Quarter 3 financial report), and noted that the University expects to deliver better than budgeted for 2023/24, delivering an improved outcome against the -£31 million deficit budget.
- Noted that the student recruitment figures were looking positive so far and that the University was using some new approaches to maximise applicant conversion.

- Stated that subject to student recruitment targets going to plan, he had confidence that the University would be able to deliver the future budgets agreed previously with Council. He further noted that the 2024/25 budget would reduce the University's debt to 43% of its annual turnover by July 2025 (down from 58% in 2019).
- Noted that under item 6 of the agenda Council members were being asked to support the establishment of a Consultation Group to include members of the UCU and the Staff Forum, under the University's Restructuring Policy, to prepare for any potential restructuring that may involve redundancies, as part of the plan to deliver budget targets;
- Noted that item 18 on the agenda included some tightening of the ethical investments policy related to financing fossil fuel activities, encouraged by the Friends of Palestine occupation;
- Explained that the outcome of recent local elections was likely to be positive for the University, in that it is expected that Wokingham Borough Council will proceed with the Local Plan to be published after the general election. It is expected that the Local Plan will include Loddon Garden Village and also the extension of the Thames Valley Science Park to include the 'northern quarter' which would add around 30 acres of University land to development potential. The Vice-Chancellor further set out that it would take approximately a year for the Local Plan to gain full approval, and that, in the meantime, the University would seek opportunities to sell the three remaining development plots around Shinfield;
- Noted that the Council was being asked to approve the high level direction set out in the final report of the Agrifood Futures Strategy under item 3 of the agenda. He noted that implications of the approval would have far reaching consequences for how the University will use its landbank and for developing its farming facilities in the future. Furthermore it was noted that the Council was also being asked to approve the request to direct the circa.£2 million annual contribution to the NIRD Trust from Investment Funds towards the new Agrifoods Futures Strategy;
- Confirmed that the purchase of land from the Farley Estate, which was approved by Council at its summer 2023 meeting, has been concluded. He clarified that this land would now be referred to as "Land at Tanner's Farm, Farley Estate". [Redacted, Section 43].
- Noted that the external auditor had noted at the last Audit Committee meeting that there was no question as to whether the University was a going concern thanks to its strong and growing balance sheet.
- Informed Council of five highlights at the University to be aware of:
 - The University was launching its new Teaching and Learning Portfolio for academic year 2024/25. Work towards this project had included streamlining programmes and modules, redefining assessment at the level of programme rather than module, and a move to semesterisation; ensuring that students are assessed immediately after the relevant semester. The Vice-Chancellor confirmed that the outcome of this project would improve student experience and reduce staff workload, it was noted that Professor McCrum would provide more detail on this at a later date;
 - The University had been confirmed in the top 200 universities in the QS World University Rankings for the second year in a row;

- The University had been named 28th in the world and 5th in the UK in the Times Higher Education Impact Awards (based on UN Sustainable Development Goals);
- The World Re-Imagined Globes had been installed around the University. The Vice-Chancellor thanked the Chancellor for this initiative;
- Shinfield Studios had reached practical completion which represented a \$300m investment. The Vice-Chancellor confirmed that the studios were fully booked from the end of the year and that discussions were starting to take place to ensure students and colleagues were able to maximise the benefits from Shinfield Studios.

Following the Vice-Chancellor's opening remarks, the President acknowledged all the University's recent achievements.

In response to questions, the Vice-Chancellor:

- Confirmed that it could not yet be known what impact, if any, the general election would have on the University's plans in India;
- Explained that the Office for Students had confirmed that it would not step in if universities were to fail due to financial non-viability, but that his assessment was that in reality the failure of a UK university would have a huge impact and may mean that the Government would be forced to take some action;
- Considered whether there would be any potential opportunities for Reading, should other local universities fail. The Vice-Chancellor concluded that it would be difficult to facilitate a merger of universities and that doing so would be very costly. It was noted that any potential opportunity would need to be considered on a case by case basis, and that it would be vital to understand why exactly the university failed.

24/42 Disclosure of Interests

The Council received the Council Register of Interests report for Council Meetings

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (International) (Professor Baylon) noted that the Council Register of Interests should be updated to include that she is a Director of Reading University Malaysia (RUMAL). The Register would be updated accordingly.

Presentation/discussion items

24/43 Council Effectiveness

The Council received the Effectiveness of Council Report, which set out a summary of the points raised as part of the 2023/24 appraisal review process, and a summary of the feedback provided by Council members from the round table discussions held at the end of previous Council meetings.

The Council were asked to:

- (a) Note the content of the Effectiveness of Council Report
- (b) Engage in table discussions about the report and feed-back on anything they were surprised to see in the report or that they felt should be included or prioritised in the

future. Council members were also asked what could be done to ensure they and the wider University had a clearer understanding of their roles and responsibilities.

The main points raised were as follows:

- While many members felt that they did understand the role of Council, to ensure that all members did so, there was a need to clarify the purpose of the Council, including its commercial and academic responsibilities, and the legal and fiscal implications of being a Trustee of a charity;
- The Financial Regulations set out the minimum requirements for Council members in regard to their financial responsibilities;
- There could be a session on the responsibilities of Council for members in September to cover:
 - Terms of Reference
 - External Sources
 - Precip of Council responsibilities for new members
 - Requirements of the regulator (OfS);

- There could be advantage in Council determining what “good” looks like in terms of its effectiveness, allied with a framework for future appraisals including broad brush headings against which Council can appraise itself
- The appraisal process should be used to identify any Council members who are struggling and help ensure that the right support is then provided; it could also be a useful mechanism to ensure that all members feel able, and know how best to, disagree with proposals put forward to them; and to ensure that training needs are identified and met (for example, through what is offered by Advance HE)

- Council must be sufficiently informed so that it can assure itself before making the decisions required of it.
- But there needs to be a greater emphasis on strategy (sometimes the matters Council is asked to consider are too operational or lacking in broader context)
- Council should see strategic direction early on so that they can shape and feed into it, rather than receiving a paper with a fully formed strategy
- There could be more effective time management, such as making use of the lunch hour to hold any required round table discussions;
- Dashboards as a way of checking on the progress of projects rather than dense and/or lengthy updates at Council meetings;
- Papers need to have consistently good cover sheets which summarise the main points and decisions required, with additional details available separately
- Tenure and roles and responsibilities of Council members on committees need to be clear
- Council members need more context and background related to the sector, for example the OfS papers mentioned in the Vice-Chancellor’s opening remarks

24/44 Short presentation from the new RSU Officers on their priorities

The Council received a short presentation from Mr Haxell (the incoming Reading Student Union President) and Mr Gandhi (the incoming Reading Student Union Education Officer) on their priorities for the upcoming year.

Mr Gandhi confirmed the names and roles of the other RSU Sabbatical Officers as Nathan Norris, the Activities and Opportunities Officer, Sarah Ifidon, the Welfare Officer, and Gabe James the inclusion and communities officer.

Mr Haxell set out RSU's priorities for the year ahead as follows:

- To alleviate the pressures of cost of living
- Improving students' wellbeing
- Equipping students for their future

Mr Haxell advised that understanding and engaging with students was vital to RSU success and that as a result the RSU Trustee Board had approved a project to build on current student engagement in order to conduct segmentation research to better understand the groups represented by the RSU. Mr Haxell explained that the results of the research would be used to develop strategic priorities and initiatives to support the development of a new SU strategy, which would launch in line with the University's centenary year, in 2026.

It was confirmed that further themes of focus for RSU over the coming year would be housing, mental health, sustainability, student employability and safety.

It was confirmed that these objectives had been well-received by the Student Experience Committee.

The President thanked Mr Haxell and Mr Gandhi for their concise presentation, and confirmed that she looked forward to working with them during the coming year.

24/45 Budget

The Council received the following papers:

- The 2024/25 Budget
- Background papers which provided context for the budget approval paper:
 - FQ3 report
 - Student Recruitment Position

The President confirmed that the Council were being asked to approve the 2024/25 budget during this meeting, and that it represented the deficit position that had previously been agreed by the Council. The President acknowledged that the budget demonstrated a pragmatic approach to the University's current financial position, and that the budget set out in the papers reflected a way to improve the deficit while maintaining the quality of provision. The President reminded the Council that the proposals had been explained to the Audit Committee and scrutinised by the Scrutiny and Finance Committee.

Quarter 3 Report

The Director of Finance outlined that there had been little movement in the University's financial position between quarter 2 and quarter 3, but that the Quarter 3 report did demonstrate an improvement of around £2 million from that forecast in the Quarter 2 report (and the budget agreed by Council in July 2023), bringing the group deficit to a forecast of £29.1 million. This position would fall within the budget envelope set by Council for 2023/24 of a deficit of £31 million.

The Director of Finance advised two significant donations had been recognised totalling £1.7 million, one of which had been received and the other which would be received shortly. Both donations were restricted, but were very welcome. It was confirmed that pension scheme valuation impacts, investment property valuations and foreign exchange movements were not included in the forecast as these were accounted for at the end of the year. It was anticipated that the USS pension deficit provision would disappear at year end and the beneficial impact of the in year cost reduction due to lower employer contribution rates was included in the Quarter 3 forecast .

In response to questions it was advised:

- that the two recent donations received would be recognised in full in 2023/24 as income, as per accounting standards;
- that individuals who donate to the University are often recognised in some way if they choose to be, including through admission to the college of benefactors;
- that the University will use the upcoming centenary celebrations to push strategy in the alumni relations area, being cognisant of investment verses reward;

Student Recruitment Position

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Planning and Resources) explained that the paper received by the Council had been updated from the version received by the Scrutiny and Finance Committee in May 2024.

The figures modelled in the paper were from 17 June, but Professor Zaum confirmed that there had been no significant changes to the position since then. [Redacted, Section 43]. Professor Zaum explained that the University was on track to be where it wanted to be, but that there inevitably remained some uncertainty at this point in the admissions cycle.

Professor Zaum confirmed that some key risks still remained including any further changes to visa regimes that may impact the ability of international students to come to the UK to study. It was explained to Council that the University had modelled scenarios relating to a decline in international student recruitment and the options for financially mitigating the impact and that further more detailed contingency plans were being developed. Professor Zaum confirmed that the scenarios modelled assume broadly stable home numbers, and that the University was not expecting a change in trajectory in this area.

In response to questions it was confirmed that the University was seeking to ensure that increased recruitment into one school did not negatively impact any others, and that risk in this area was being mitigated by factoring recruitment plans into the annual planning process.

2024/25 Budget

The Director of Finance (Mr Grice) confirmed that the 2024/25 budget had been created as an output of the Sustainable Planning Process, and reported to Scrutiny and Finance Committee and Council in March 2024. He advised that the figures and assumptions had been reviewed and that although the position had improved slightly, nothing major had changed for 2024/25.

Mr Grice advised:

- the University would deliver a deficit of –£20.3 million (at University Group level) and that this was largely the same as that reported to Council in March 2024;
- interest rates had not lowered significantly so had been revised upwards post the March Council paper;
- the pay award assumption for 2024/25 had been revised down slightly generating an improvement;
- the University's debt proportion vs income had come down significantly in recent years;
- the University was comfortably meeting all of its banking covenants;
- the Auditors had verbally confirmed that there were no going-concern issues for the University in the medium term but would review again at point of accounts signature;
- the Budget report modelled 3 scenarios, one reflecting an improved position from that forecasted and 2 reflecting worse positions. The 3rd scenario reflected the worst outcome for the University and assumed low international student recruitment as a result of restrictions on immigration. [Redacted, Section 43].

In response to questions:

Mr Grice advised:

- that he was relatively comfortable that the forecasted savings for next year could be made, but that a reduction in costs and an improvement in student numbers would be required in order to meet the budget.
- the University had decided to cap its capital budget at £40 million, as approved by Council previously, and there was no plans to increase that currently;
- that the projected figures in the budget were made on the assumption of not receiving any further donations, and that this was usual practice;

Professor Zaum confirmed that the University was [redacted, section 43] to consider long term accommodation solutions given the plans to increase student numbers each year. He explained that there was still some capacity in halls, and that he believed that the existing accommodation provision would be adequate for the next academic year. Professor Zaum confirmed that Council would receive a presentation on plans for accommodation provision from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education and Student Experience) Peter Miskell, at a future meeting.

The Vice-Chancellor confirmed that the University did not have plans to cap student numbers on the basis of accommodation availability, but that this was something that the University was conscious of, and that the data relating to conversion would be monitored carefully. Professor Van de Noort also explained that the nature of higher education was changing and that due to rising costs of living, there may be an increase in students choosing to commute to their local University, rather than living away from home. It was also confirmed that the University

intended to remove the accommodation guarantee once projected student numbers got to a certain level.

It was noted that the Council was being asked to approve a large deficit budget and that Council members would like to understand more about the position of other universities in the sector in order to understand the University's relative position. It was noted that further scenario analysis provided to members of Council would be helpful ahead of further difficult years.

[Redacted, Section 43].

The President proposed that the 2024/25 Budget was approved, noting that the position should be reassessed following confirmation of the final student numbers for the 2024/25 academic year, and further discussions entered into, if required.

Resolved:

1. "That the Budget 2024-25, now submitted, be approved"

24/46 Restructuring activity under the Restructuring Procedure

The Council received a paper on Restructuring Activity under the Restructuring Procedure.

The Vice Chancellor explained that there were currently no formal proposals for restructuring within specific Schools or Directorates; however, it was important to have the correct procedures in place in case a need for restructuring arose. The Vice-Chancellor confirmed that the University's policy included an obligation to try and avoid compulsory redundancies wherever possible. The Council were asked to approve the creation of a Consultation Group under 4.2 of the Restructuring Procedure.

Further, the Council was asked to consider the proposed membership of the Consultation Group, being advised that Professor James Devenney was the recommended Head of School and that Professor Gunter Kuhnle was the recommended member of the Senate. The Council was also asked to nominate the required lay member of Council. The Council nominated Mrs Sue Maple to sit on the Consultation Group.

In response to questions, the Vice Chancellor confirmed that there were no proposals for University wide restructuring, and that it was more likely that targeted and specific areas for restructuring would come forward in the future as part of the work carried out under the Restructuring Procedure.

Resolved:

1. "That the establishment and membership of a Consultation Group under clause 4.2 of the Restructuring Procedure, be approved"

24/47 Report on Agriculture and Food

The Council received the final report from the Agrifood scoping project.

The President reminded Council members that the Council was being asked to approve the overall direction of the project today, with further details and plans for implementation to follow. She also reminded Council members that as Trustees of the NIRD Trust, they would need to be mindful of their fiduciary duties when considering the proposal to invest the financial allocation from the NIRD Trust into the project.

The Council received a short presentation from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) (Professor Parveen Yaqoob) and her colleague Kate Hough.

Professor Yaqoob explained that the Council was being asked to look at the general direction proposed in the paper. She explained that the project was very complex and that the scoping phase had been on-going for 18 months. She further explained that the Argifoods project had aimed to identify transformative actions which would enhance and consolidate the University's position as a global leader in agriculture and food research and advance knowledge to address global challenges relating to sustainable agrifood systems in a changing planet.

Professor Yaqoob set out the 3 main reasons for the project as:

1. The University's commitment to undertaking agriculture and food research in order to provide solutions to a global challenge;
2. The fact that the University has previously had a very good reputation in agriculture; however, the most recent REF results were disappointing which had a direct financial impact on the University. The University has also enjoyed very good QS World Rankings in this area, previously being ranked 1st in UK, whereas the University's current ranking was 3rd. Professor Yaqoob advised that rankings were important as they are often factors considered by students (particularly international students) when deciding where to attend university.
3. The University has access to assets held on Trust which can only be invested in agriculture and food research.

Professor Yaqoob set out the proposed approach for the project, explaining that the strategy had been developed based on areas of opportunity, which mapped onto the national Agri-tech centre. She noted that success of the project in the short to medium term would be measured by achieving a top 3 position in the REF and a top position in the QS rankings.

Ms Hough spoke to the Council about the vision and mission of the project, and the 3 priority research areas that would make up the Research Strategy; these being:

- Area 1: Enabling transformation to a resilient food system that works for all
- Area 2: Developing Climate and Nature-Positive Farming Systems
- Area 3: Enabling people to eat healthy and sustainable foods

Ms Hough explained that the University was in a unique position in that it was able to use investments from the NIRD Trust to fund parts of the project. It was suggested that if Council was minded to approve the direction of travel, it would be possible to bring forward some near term next steps for review shortly.

Professor Yaqoob set out that the proposals constituted a very significant piece of work and that further details, including feasibility, would be set out in an implementation plan which would follow, should Council decide to approve the proposal put forward. [Redacted, Section 43].

Professor Yaqoob asked the Council to:

- Discuss and agree the high-level strategic direction for the Agrifoods Futures Strategy
- Agree further work on an implementation plan encompassing each of the enabling investments (The plan would be brought back to a future Council meeting, once the Scrutiny and Finance Committee had reviewed it)
- Acting as NIRD Trustee, agree that the framework could be used to guide decision making relating to the annual NIRD allocation of £1-2 million, which was managed by the NIRD Committee.
- Acting as NIRD Trustee, agree to the proposed Senior Strategy Programme Manager post that will develop and deliver the implementation plan

In response to questions, Professor Yaqoob advised:

- the University had failed to maintain its standing in the REF due to the fact that the University had produced research outputs with a 2 star tail. A proportion of these came from agricultural economics which was not seen as sufficiently innovative. It was imperative to provide good impact case studies in order to perform well in the REF;
- that in terms of the international opportunities related to the project, there was lots of scope to grow but no cohesive international vision currently;
- that in terms of demonstrating a benefit to the University as a whole, the successful implementation of the strategy should have an impact on the University's REF results, and improve the University's QS world rankings which in turn was likely to attract international students to Reading;
- in answer to requests for further details related to levels of investment, and clarification about who the University's competitors would be in this area, that the project was designed to take a holistic approach, [Redacted, Section 43].
- that it was not yet clear whether the University would need to obtain a particular type of farm in order to complete the planned research, or whether it would be more appropriate to have a network of farms across a particular area. Professor Yaqoob explained that further detail would be provided in the implementation plan, and that it was proposed that specialist consultants be consulted on the vision and the practical implementation of it, particularly around the future of farming research.

The President noted that it was clear that a lot of work had been done already on the project scope, but that there was still a lot of associated work to be done. It was noted that the Council was keen to see an implementation plan sooner rather than later in order to better understand the proposal. There was also a strong invitation from the Council for Professor Yaqoob and her colleagues to consider the ambition of the project and ensure that any implementation plan requested enough resource early on to move forward with the plans. The President, noting that there remained lots of significant decisions to make, and that investment largely depended on approval of land development, requested that a progress report be brought to Council at the November meeting.

The Council endorsed the direction of travel set out in the Agrifood Scoping Project report and encouraged further work on the project, noting a desire for greater ambition and, if necessary, investment in the strategy.

The Council acting as Trustees for the NIRD Trust agreed to allocate funding to fund the Senior Strategy programme Manager post, and agreed to allocate the £1-2million from the NIRD Trust as per the framework for Enabling investments.

Resolved:

1. “That the high-level strategic direction for the Agrifood Futures Strategy, be approved
2. That further work on an implementation plan encompassing each of the Enabling Investments, which will be brought to Council in November, be approved
3. That, acting as the Trustees of NIRD, the proposed Senior Strategy Programme Manager post that will develop and deliver the implementation plan, funded via NIRD Trust and commencing in Autumn 2024, be approved
4. That, acting as the Trustees of the NIRD, the framework of Enabling investments set out in the report inform the use of the £1-2m annual allocation from the NIRD Trust, be approved.”

24/48 Report of the Senate

The Council received the Report of the Senate.

Resolved:

1. “That the Annual Report for the Concordat to Support the Carer Development of Researchers, be approved
2. That the Annual Statement on Research Integrity, be approved.
3. That a number of other items, specified in the report, be noted.”

24/49 Report of the Appointments Committee

The Council received the report of the Appointment Committee.

The President advised that the Council were being asked to approve the appointment of three new lay members of Council, namely Jackie Liu (with effect from 1 January 2025), Paul Milner (with effect from 1 August 2024) and Sally Peck (with effect from 1 August 2024).

Resolved:

1. “That as specified in the Report the appointment of three new lay members of Council, namely Jackie Liu, Paul Milner and Sally Peck, be approved.”

The President confirmed that outcomes from the discussions related to the effectiveness of Council would feed into inductions of the new members.

24/50 Report of the Audit Committee

The Council received the Report of the Audit Committee.

The President advised that Council were being asked to approve the risk register for 2024/25, and the Annual Report from the Risk Management Group. The President noted that there were increasing references to different types of risk in matters to be determined by Council, at Council meetings and also in various committees that Council members were a part of. She noted that Council would have a further conversation on risk appetite at a future Council meeting.

In response to questions, the Chair of the Audit Committee noted:

- That the report submitted had a very good update on cyber related risk to the University, mitigation of which played an increasingly critical part in protecting the university;
- training in cyber security was key to reducing the risk of being caught out by a cyber-attack.

Resolved:

1. “That the draft Risk Register for 2024/25, as submitted, be approved
2. That the Annual Report from the Risk Management Group, as submitted, be approved
3. That a number of other matters including a presentation on Cyber Security (Risk 13), an update on Risk 12, and in particular the allocation of governance responsibilities to Council and its sub-committees, and what the criteria should be to indicate that a partnership is sufficiently significant that it requires Council approval, be noted.”

24/51 Financial Regulations

The Council received an updated version of the Financial Regulations.

It was noted that the regulations had been refreshed in order to reflect new working structures and job titles at the University, and names and remits of sub committees of Council, and in regards to the 2023/24 annual letters to budget holders, which had been approved by the University Executive Board. Furthermore there were some changes to the ability of sub committees of Council to sign off on spending, meaning that any spend above £3 million must now be approved by Council.

Resolved:

1. “That the amended Financial Regulations, as submitted and noting the endorsement of them by the Scrutiny and Finance Committee, be approved.”

Items for report

24/52 Report of the Vice-Chancellor

The Council received the Report of the Vice-Chancellor.

In response to questions related to the ongoing occupation of University land by Friends of Palestine protesters, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Planning and Resources) (Professor Zaum) advised that the University had been engaging with the protesters and an update of the Vice-Chancellor's interactions with them was available on the Staff Portal, which had also been shared with students. Professor Zaum explained that the University was required to balance in any action taken the rights of the protesters to freedom of speech and expression, and the rights of staff and students of the University not to be harassed. Professor Zaum advised that currently the University felt that it had got the balance right, in allowing the protesters to protest peacefully, having security monitoring the situation at all times, and taking action where members of the University community felt that they were being harassed.

It was noted that relevant provisions in the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act were coming into force from the 1st August, but that the introduction of this legislation would not change the University's position concerning the conduct of the protest.

Resolved:

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

24/53 Report of the Scrutiny and Finance Committee

The Council received a report from the Scrutiny and Finance Committee

Resolved:

1. "That the Report of the Scrutiny and Finance Committee, now submitted, be received"

24/54 Update on University of Reading Malaysia

The Council received a report providing an update on University of Reading Malaysia.

The President noted that there was helpful work going on in this area.

Resolved:

1. "That a paper providing an update on University of Reading Malaysia, now submitted, be received."

24/55 Report of the People and Remuneration Committee

The Council received the report of the People and Remuneration Committee.

The President noted the work undertaken by the Committee on the Corporate Risk Register in relation in particular to Risk 1.

Resolved:

1. “That the Report of the People and Remuneration Committee, now submitted, be received.”

24/56 Report of Student Experience Committee

The Council received the report of Student Experience Committee.

Mr Alexander (Chair of Student Experience Committee) noted the work currently being done around student growth and the impact on student accommodation. Mr Alexander advised that it was important that these conversations relating to plans to increase student accommodation continued, in order to explore and implement a workable solution.

Resolved:

1. “That the Report of the Student Experience Committee, now submitted, be received.”

24/57 Report of the Honorary Degrees Committee

The Council received the report of the Honorary Degrees Committee.

Resolved

1. “That the Report of the Honorary Degrees Committee, now submitted, be received, and that the recommendations for an Honorary Degree be approved.”

24/58 Report of the Investment and Development Committee

The Council received the Report of the Investment and Development Committee.

Mr Corrigan (Chair of the Investments and Developments Committee) noted the changes that had been made to the Investment Policy as a response to the University’s response to the student encampment on campus. He confirmed that the Investment policy had been updated to extend the fossil fuel exclusion to financing activities, and to denote the Banking on Climate Chaos (BOCC) dataset as the source for any exclusion decision.

Mr Corrigan advised that he considered that the situation had been handled well considering the urgency of the request and that he had received assurance from the University’s Investment Manager that action taken as a result of the changes to the Investment Policy, in excluding investment in particular banks, was manageable.

The President thanked Mr Corrigan for all the work he had done in this area.

Resolved:

1. “That the Report of the Investment and Development Committee, now submitted, be received.”

24/59 Suggested items for future Council meetings

The Council received a paper on “Topics for future Council meetings”

The President advised Council members to consider whether there were other matters that Council should be discussing, and inform the University Secretary if there were.

Council members suggested an earlier start to meetings, to ensure that the Council had enough time to consider all required business, and a request for a way to track progress on papers and

proposals so that members could monitor when they should expect to receive papers back to Council for an update.

Resolved:

1. “That a paper on suggested topics for discussion by Council, now submitted, be received.”

Items for note

24/60 Minutes 24/18-24/38 of the meeting held on 11 March 2024

Minutes 24/18-24/38 of the meeting held on 11 March 2024 were confirmed

24/61 Matters Arising not elsewhere on the agenda, if any

There were no matters arising.

24/62 Decisions taken by the President on behalf of the Council:

The Council noted that the President had made a number of decisions on behalf of the Council.

The Council was asked:

(a) To note that, the President has approved, on behalf of Council, and on recommendation of the University Executive Board, that the term Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor be introduced as a more commonly used term in the sector than Dean for cross-cutting institutional roles, on the understanding that the actual use of the term will be approved by the University Executive Board on a case-by-case basis.

(b) To note that the President has approved, on behalf of Council, and on recommendation of the University Executive Board and with input from the Chair of Scrutiny and Finance Committee, that a Project Committee be established for the Health and Life Sciences Boiler replacement and optimisation, a budget of [redacted, section 43], and that a building contract will be awarded.

(c) To note that the President has approved, on behalf of Council, and on recommendation of the University Executive Board and with input from the Chair of Scrutiny and Finance Committee, that a Project Committee be established for the Health and Life Sciences Cole Archive and Herbarium move, at a budget of [redacted, section 43], and that a building contract be awarded.

(d) To note that the President has approved, on behalf of Council, and on recommendation of the RUMAL Board, [redacted, section 40] that a new Provost be recruited.

24/63 Documents sealed and to be sealed

The Council received a list of documents sealed and to be sealed.

Resolved:

“That the Council note 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”

24/64 Any Other Business

The RSU Education Office (Mr Gandhi) raised a concern about the timing of accommodation payments for students. He advised that payment for University Accommodation was being taken before students had received maintenance loans, which was causing financial stress for students. The University Secretary agreed to raise the issue with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education and Student Experience) (Professor Miskell) to consider any potential solutions, noting that Professor Miskell was currently away from the University. It was agreed that once Professor Miskell had considered the issue, he would bring it to the University Executive Board, who would report back up to the Student Experience Committee

24/65 Dates of meetings of the Council for the session 2024/25:

The meetings of Council for the session 2024/25 had been scheduled for:

Thursday 26 September 2024, 12-5pm

Wednesday 20 November 2024, 10am-1pm (with dinner the evening before)

Tuesday 21 January 2025, 12-5pm

Monday 10 March 2025, 12-5pm

Monday 30 June 2025, 12-5pm

24/66 Reflections on the meeting that has just concluded, led by the President

Members reflected in small groups on the business and nature of the discussions of the meeting.