

## **Council**

**26/01 A meeting of the Council was held at 10.00 am on Tuesday 20 January 2026 in Carrington 201, Whiteknights Campus.**

Present at the meeting:

The President (Mrs Helen Gordon, In the Chair)  
The Vice-Presidents (Mr Kevin Corrigan & Mrs Kate Owen)  
The Vice-Chancellor (Professor Robert Van de Noort)  
The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Professor Parveen Yaqoob)  
The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Dr Caroline Baylon)  
The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Professor Elizabeth McCrum)  
The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Professor Dominik Zaum)  
Mr Steve Alexander  
Mr Shamshad Ali  
Professor Elena Beleska-Spasova  
Professor Richard Frazier  
Professor Jon Gibbins  
Ms Martina Hudson  
Mrs Sue Maple  
Mr Peter Milhofer  
Mr Paul Milner  
Ms Sally Peck (to minute 26/08)  
Mrs Sally Plank  
Dr Michelle Sancho  
Professor Katja Strohfeldt  
Dr Janet Young

In attendance:

The Chief Financial Officer (Mr Vin Wijeratne)  
The Chief Operating Officer (Ms Laura Clayton)  
[Redacted, section 40], RSU ([redacted, section 40]) (to minute 26/06)  
Ms Tasha Easton, Governance (minute secretary)  
Ms Louise Sharman, University Secretary

Apologies:

Mrs Sian Butler  
Mr Angus McCallum  
Mr Jackie Liu

Ms Tiam Koravand

### **26/02 President's opening remarks**

The President welcomed Dr Sancho to the meeting as the new elected member representing Professional Services. The President noted that this was the last meeting for Professor Strohfeldt and thanked her for all her contributions. Professor Strohfeldt thanked Council members for their support and spoke of how she valued her time on the Council.

The President noted that Ms Sharman had been appointed as University Secretary and welcomed her to Council.

The President welcomed the [redacted, section 40] Reading Students' Union, [redacted, section 40] to the meeting, who would be delivering a presentation on the Segmentation Project.

The Council noted that it was not quorate on this occasion. The Council was asked to agree that any decisions made during the meeting be circulated to those not attending for their ratification. This approach was agreed.

### **26/03 Vice-Chancellor's opening remarks**

The Vice-Chancellor gave an update on several areas, as follows:

#### *Sector context and government: White Paper*

- Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper  
Following the publication of the White Paper, the Autumn 2025 Budget had proposed a shift from a percentage charge of 6% levy on international recruitment to a fixed charge of £925 per international student – this would be implemented to international student enrolments from academic year 2028/29. Whilst this was not welcome, it was helpful to have clarity about the cost and timeframe expected.
- In terms of the research environment, there was a shift towards funding research that was supporting economic growth and the Government's industrial strategy, which might make it harder for the humanities and research where the immediate benefits to society were harder to quantify. There would likely be a shift towards larger and fewer grants where impact could be more demonstrable. Larger, research-intensive universities would benefit most from this direction to travel.
- A number of universities were undergoing large scale restructuring and redundancies, including two universities that had scaled back their operations significantly, from c20k students to c12k. The position in Scotland and Wales was also challenging as a tuition fee increase had not yet been agreed.

With the international student levy, additional NI contributions, and salary sacrifice costs on pensions the University would have to fund an extra £10m of costs each year. Overall, there were still universities seeing growth and those who were in decline and needed to reshape. The University continued to grow, with home UG applications increasing by [redacted,

section 43] this year. It would be interesting to see how applications translated into firm or insurance acceptances this session.

Ms Plank asked how the University was planning to meet the additional £10m each year. The Vice-Chancellor explained that this would be absorbed into the budget.

Mr Ali asked about the changing research environment and how this would impact the University, in particular if there were opportunities to scale-up and invest in talent. The Vice-Chancellor explained that there were some opportunities, but it was not widespread across all University disciplines. Where there were strengths in research areas, such as in climate, environmental sustainability, and farming, there were opportunities for collaborations to get more funding, but other disciplines might struggle. The University would need to consider opportunities to develop its research strengths to be more interdisciplinary across Schools and Departments.

Mr Milner asked whether the University would pass the international student levy onto the student or absorb the cost. He was informed that, although some of the top universities might pass this cost onto their students, the University would absorb the costs. Dr Baylon noted that international tuition fees had increased significantly across the sector with an average fee of c£30k per year.

Dr Sancho noted the increase in home UG applications and asked if it was clear what had contributed to the growth. The Vice-Chancellor noted that recruitment numbers had picked up since 2018 due to a number of factors. The University had changed how it presented itself, with a bigger focus on values including climate and sustainability – this had been well received by students. The University had also focused on diversity and inclusion and with the opening of the Elizabeth line, this had made the University a good choice for diverse groups from in and around Greater London. It was noted that attainment at A' level in schools in London was higher than anywhere in the country, so the University was attracting high tariff applicants. The University was also cognisant of the change in the student body, which now included around 20% of commuter students.

*Update on the Six mitigation areas:*

- Global Sustainability Leaders scholarships – this was now embedded in recruitment campaigns
- Learning and Engagement Analytics Project (LEAP) – this project had been delayed but was in development.
- Savings in Schools – VR in selected departments and in Chemistry has been completed, with additional saving allocations on track. Ms Plank asked about sizing and whether

School structures were still being considered. The Vice-Chancellor explained that there were no proposals for any major changes in School structures in the immediate future.

- Savings in Directorates – The Professional Services Programme was currently under review, and lessons were being learnt from HRMS and CAFM digital projects. Monthly reporting from January 2026 would assist with delivery of projects. The RAG rating for this mitigation area had been changed to yellow.
- Realising Henley’s potential – The Henley Strategy and savings were on track, as was the Tianjin partnership – this had now been approved which brought it back on time to start in September this year for some programmes.
- Internationalisation and Global Engagement – The regional hubs in Malaysia, India and China were in progress. The ISLI/Global Academy re-launch had been completed. The Global Rankings Strategy was currently in hand.

Mr Corrigan asked about the Global Sustainability Leadership Scholarships and about targets for this recruitment round. Professor Zaum reported that the target for last year had been [redacted, section 43] but it was important to achieve a balance between home and international students. [redacted, section 43]. The target for this year was [redacted, section 43] ensuring that the balance between home and international was still achieved. [redacted, section 43].

Dr Baylon addressed the Council about an email that had been received [redacted, section 40]. She explained that the Malaysia campus had been reviewed to ensure its programmes, structure and finances were sustainable. This was now on track and recruitment had grown by [redacted, section 43] students over the last three years. A new operational strategy and 5-year plan had been developed. However, the RUMAL Board had agreed that it was not able to rely on growth alone, and some areas of operations and academia had been restructured to support the next stage of growth and the launch of new programmes. She assured the Council that all proper processes had been followed and that the restructure had largely affected a small group of staff in one programme area. Whilst these were difficult decisions, they were necessary to ensure the campus was moving in the right direction.

*Update on the Top 10 strategic projects (non-mitigation):*

- Strategy (2026 onwards) - Progressing according to timeline
- Portfolio Review Pathway – This was considered BAU and would be removed from the list.
- Loddon Garden Village (and TVSP extension) – The Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) had passed the first stage with no major queries.
- ECMWF – construction was progressing, with delivery expected by the end of 2026. The research collaboration with the Met Office was in progress.

- Natural History Museum - construction of the new building at TVSP was progressing, with delivery expected 2027. [Redacted, section 43].
- [Redacted, section 43].
- [Redacted, section 43].
- Agri-Food Futures – Some senior appointments had been made and others were in progress. Work on the research platform/future farm was in progress.
- Estate and Digital Strategies – These items would be revisited at a future meeting. [Redacted, section 43].
- Academic Workload Model – a draft model would be piloted in Spring 2026.

### **26/04 Disclosure of Interests**

The Disclosure of Interests was received and noted. Members were asked to pass any updates to the Secretary.

### **26/05 Presentation from RSU: Update on the Segmentation Project**

The Council received a presentation from [redacted, section 40] RSU, [redacted, section 40]. The project focused on what students wanted from their Students' Union and considered a different way to categorise students from traditional methods (e.g. mode of study, gender, department etc). Due to shifts across the sector [redacted, section 40] felt that it was good time to build on the good relationship between RSU and the University further and use this data to enhance both RSU's Strategy, the University Strategy, and the student experience.

The presentation highlighted:

#### *Research approach*

- Students had changed post-Covid and the project aimed to understand their needs, develop a new Strategy, and increase student engagement.
- A market research team had looked at different ways of segmenting students based on their values and motivations, along with what they wanted from the Students' Union. [redacted, section 43]. Researchers analysed the data and created a segmentation solution.
- They identified students from these segments and selected some to do focus groups to enrich the data.
- This was followed by a full debrief, which included some students and the Trustee Board. The project revealed how students liked to be contacted, tone of communication and what their priorities were. It could also be used to categorise new students and the data was future proofed for around 5 years.
- [Redacted, section 43].
- [Redacted, section 43].
- [Redacted, section 43].

*The Segments:*

- [Redacted, section 43].

[Redacted, section 43].

Professor Zaum asked if students tended to stay in their category throughout their degree journey. [Redacted, section 40] explained that they would ask a set of questions each year which would help answer this, but it was expected students would move between 2-3 categories throughout their student journey.

*What does this mean for RSU:*

- RSU were already seeing more engagement from students and planned to refocus the Students' Union using this data.
- The RSU Strategy 2025-28 would be developed in response to this research.
- [Redacted, section 43].

The President thanked [redacted, section 40] for such a full and informative presentation and opened the room to questions.

Mr Ali asked how this could be monitored to ensure that it was working and helping students more than currently. [Redacted, section 40] explained that whilst the data team would be able to proactively see what students wanted, RSU would be constantly reviewing its approach and would be open to shifting where needed. RSU was looking to embed the student voice in all that it did, and get students involved in plans below the strategy level where possible. [Redacted, section 43].

Mr Milhofer found the project useful in breaking down stereotypes of students. He queried whether these groups might change in future, as students changed further – for example, if there were more commuter students, or more students working whilst studying. [Redacted, section 43].

Mr Alexander asked what the generational key changes were in the CEO role. [Redacted, section 43].

Mr Milner asked about the different ways that student in each segment might want to be engaged with. He also asked if students would self-select where they fitted or whether RSU would allocate students to groups and whether this could be used to tailor their customer journey. [Redacted, section 43].

Professor Gibbins recognised the value in this information for RSU and also in how students engaged with their studies and university life more generally. He asked whether this could be shared with the University and partnerships developed with Schools, in order to support students better, help them engage and encourage them to seek careers opportunities. [Redacted, section 40] added that the data had been presented to the Careers team already and there were conversations underway about how RSU and the University could work together further on this.

Ms Maple noted that the presentation was very thorough and the data insightful. [Redacted, section 43]. She added that there was a lot of pressure on sabbatical officers to be the voice of the student, but they only had their own experiences to draw on, so it was important to data from a wide range of students in order to steer changes.

The President thanked [Redacted, section 40] for an interesting and insightful presentation. The Council looked forward to receiving an update at a future meeting on how the project was shaping RSU activity and about how links to the University could be advanced.

**Resolved:**

[That the update on the RSU Segmentation Project, so delivered, be received](#)

**26/06 Presentation from RSU: Update on delivery of RSU priorities**

The Council received a presentation from the sabbatical officer, Ms Hudson, on delivery of RSU priorities.

### *Priorities*

- Cost of Living
- Student Wellbeing
- Accessibility
- Increase student political engagement
- Representation
- Student Safety on campus and in the local area

### *Accomplishments and future aims*

- Brought back student-led publication 'Spark'
- Increased job opportunities for students
- Increased voter engagement and education.
- Gathered responses on lecture quality and how to improve this in future
- Collaborating with the Malaysia campus to explore different cultures and set up make Malaysia campus students feel more of the Reading community.
- Arranged a trip to the Houses of Parliament
- Organised the Reclaim the Night march
- Created support mechanisms for students staying in Reading over winter
- Supported Sexual Health Awareness and Guidance week
- Working towards reducing food waste and ensuring students have well balanced meals
- Supporting the production of the centenary mural on Edith Morley
- Introduced a video series on sexual health and awareness
- Worked with the Library on a Black History month reading list
- Launching a Microaggression Awareness Campaign.
- Launched the 'Don't Pressure your Fresher' Campaign.
- Launched and Chairs the Sports and Societies Federation,
- Helped raise £7.9k during 'Movember' for Men's Mental Health.

The President thanked Ms Hudson for her presentation of accomplishments and future projects planned and acknowledged the sheer volume of work that the sabbatical officers had achieved.

Mr Alexander noted there was a wide range of activity and asked whether there had been good engagement from students. Ms Hudson reported that it depended on the time of year but that overall, there had been more engagement than last year. For example, students had welcomed the games nights at the start of the academic year as a chance to make new friends. The team aimed to have far reaching projects which would appeal to different students.

Mr Milhofer asked how learning was passed onto the next set of sabbatical officers. Ms Hudson explained that they were compiling portfolios and documents for the new officers

and would have a more intensive handover so that they could understand the projects that had been run previously.

*How can Council support RSU:*

Ms Hudson asked Council to help support in three areas:

1. Interfaith Provision
2. Service on campus and communication
3. Safety and sexual violence on campus

As [redacted, section 40] was not present, it was agreed that the first two priorities would be followed up at Student Experience Committee and then reported onwards to Council.

Ms Hudson gave an overview of the issues reported to RSU around safety and sexual violence on campus:

- The OIA was currently drafting a new section in the Good Practice Framework around handling harassment and sexual misconduct and had asked for feedback from institutions.
- There needed to be more support around sexual violence, more victim centric support, and more training on this, particularly for academic tutors who often had most contact with students. She noted that the mandatory training currently provided was 'one size fits all' and did not address cultural change, which required community wide work.
- There was a gap in care for students who had been assaulted by their peers, as unless they chose to open a formal investigation there was little action that could take place. There needed to be stronger safeguarding measures and better communications around showing compassion. Some students might need a referral for mental health support or to have staff offer regular check-ups.
- There were 5000 students in halls accommodation but only one emergency room available which could only be used for a single night. Ms Hudson wanted to see more rooms available – she had pursued this with the Accommodation Office and with Estates to see if the space above the Co-op could be used but had not found a solution. There was a lack of a homelessness policy, and the perception of students was that the University was not doing enough in this area.

Professor Strohfeldt expressed her sadness at hearing this report as the University had historically tried to move affected students within hours and it was disappointing to hear this was no longer the standard.

Mr Milner questioned how many rooms would typically be needed – Ms Hudson explained that ideally there needed to be an entire flat available and not just one room.

Dr Sancho acknowledged that the availability of emergency accommodation was not sufficient. She asked Ms Hudson what safeguarding ideas could be put in place to make a

difference and it was agreed that they would take this offline to try and come up with solutions.

**ACTION: Dr Sancho and Ms Hudson to discuss issues around safeguarding for students who were victims of sexual assault offline.**

Mr Ali agreed that it was a concerning report and asked about where accountability lay. He suggested UEB think about what standards should be put in place and where there were practical challenges.

Professor Gibbins asked about the practicalities involved with UPP and holding rooms open. [Redacted, section 43].

Mr Milhofer thanked Ms Hudson for raising this issue. It was noted that this discussion was timely.

The Vice-Chancellor noted that consideration would be given to utilising the Cedars hotel space but this was not likely to happen in the short term.

Council noted the range of issues raised by Ms Hudson including what mechanisms were in place and who was accountable. UEB were asked to consider practical issues and to report back to Council. Mr Alexander agreed to consider this issue along with those to be raised by [redacted, section 40] at Student Experience Committee.

**ACTION: UEB to look at the issues raised and report back to Council.**

#### **Resolved:**

[That the update on delivery of RSU priorities, so delivered, be received](#)

### **26/07 University Strategy**

Following discussion at its last meeting on 19 November 2025, the Council received a further update presentation from the Vice-Chancellor on the University Strategy:

Overview:

- UEB had been considering the new Strategy for some time, following Council's direction in November 2024 to move the University towards a better ranked position. The University had already been putting plans in place to increase income and reduce costs.
- The review of the Strategy formally began in November 2025. Ideas of how to attract higher tariff students had been tested along with the best way to compete with higher-tariff competitor universities. [Redacted, section 43].
- Becoming a top 100 university was not considered a vision in itself, and Council had instead encouraged UEB to think about what attributes a top 100 university might have and how the University could meet these.
- The next phase of activity would be a period of engagement including Council members, colleagues, students and other stakeholders.

- UEB would put together a plan for delivery to 2030 later in the session and a draft Strategy would be presented to Council in June 2026 for feedback, with a view to launching it in the new academic year.

#### Attributes:

- The attributes were listed under 5 headings:
  - [Redacted, section 43]
  - [Redacted, section 43]
  - [Redacted, section 43]
  - [Redacted, section 43]
  - [Redacted, section 43]
- It was important
- It is to note that there were no differences between the campuses, and that the University was considered one University.
- Exact wording would still need to be developed by the Branding Team, but Council was asked for its views on the attributes listed.
- The attributes were based on UEB's understanding of what a top 100 university looked like, based on individual's own experience and knowledge. UEB considered what these universities did well and how they presented themselves, whilst also considering where the University had a distinctive element.
- It was noted that implementation might have far reaching consequences for those who worked here and Council should be prepared for that.
- Top 100 universities tended to have a strong alumni community to support financially and in other ways. [Redacted, section 43].
- [Redacted, section 43].
- [Redacted, section 43]. An Academic Framework was now in place which laid out expectations for all academics, which should provide a more transparent basis for who was excelling and who was underperforming. It was noted that job descriptions had been very generic in the past, so identifying underperformance had previously been hard to demonstrate.
- With the changing research environment academics could find it more challenging to secure external research funding. A funding model where international students generated a surplus which could be reinvested in research no longer existed so being awarded research grants was becoming more important. It was noted that, in order to apply for promotion on an academic contract where research was part of the role, colleagues must now meet a criterion in relation to research income.
- In terms of environmental leadership, the University had taken on the secretariat for the International University Climate Alliance, which demonstrated the University's commitment to this agenda at an international level.

- The University needed to consider the ecosystem of people that it worked with both locally and internationally and develop this further.
- In terms of changes required, some were obvious and clear, some were already in progress, but some would require quite a significant change in how the University operated.

The Vice-Chancellor posed four questions to Council:

- 1) [Redacted, section 43]
- 2) [Redacted, section 43]
- 3) [Redacted, section 43]
- 4) [Redacted, section 43]

There needed to be clear ownership for KPIs and whether this was for UEB collectively and/or individual ownership.

Council was asked to share its views and feedback on the attributes suggested and questions asked. The following points were noted:

[Redacted, section 43].

The President noted that Mr McCallum had sent her his comments, most notably echoing the comments around partnerships.

The Vice-Chancellor noted that, overall, the attributes seem to have been well received, noting the need to put an attribute about partnerships back in and focus on a USP/what differentiated the University. UEB would reflect on the wider audience outside of Council and think about what they would look for and how UEB could give them the confidence that this was deliverable. He believed that if the University systematically and consistently applied all these things it was achievable, maybe with the addition of 1 or 2 more key things. UEB would continue to work on this including how to present the part on financial sustainability. There would need to be work on culture and UEB would need to engage with different audiences of colleagues.

The Vice-Chancellor noted that Council had not commented on the goals/KPIs that would sit behind this Strategy. The University previously restricted its KPIs to 9, but over time some of these became less relevant. There could be multiple KPIs for each area which could include for e.g. NSS/REF, although this would only draw a comparison against UK universities.

Mr Corrigan added that KPIs needed to mean something, there needed to be someone accountable, and there needed to be a response if the University was too far above or below a KPI.

Mr Milhofer suggested that it would be helpful to have a smaller number of KPIs that could be focused on and ideally could be tracked more regularly than annually or every 5 years. Some would be operational for UEB to consider, a smaller number could be distilled for Council.

Mr Ali noted that some high-level rankings (such as NSS) could be useful but difficult to manage. KPIs should be around whether the University was making progress against its aims, and, if it were not, it would be helpful to spend time to review this.

Professor Beleska-Spasova noted that some KPIs could be backward looking and that objectives and key results (OKRs) might be better as they were forward looking. She felt that whilst it was appropriate to have institutional KPIs these also needed to be broken down by units to help with accountability. She suggested developing a set of OKRs and then developing a set of KPIs from there.

Ms Owen agreed that output and outcome measures would be useful.

Mr Milhofer suggested that KPIs could be more about showing progress against the attributes rather than having a fixed target.

Mr Corrigan assured UEB members that Council was engaged with co-creating this Strategy and individual members would be willing to help shape it further if requested.

The President summarised the discussion and noted that UEB would reflect on this feedback. The development of the Strategy was an iterative process and thought around KPIs in particular was needed.

She noted that what was communicated to staff and students would be really important, also how engagement sessions were managed and ownership of the long-term strategy. The reflection and engagement work would take part across the Spring with a draft Strategy presented to Council in June 2026. There might be opportunities for Council members to be involved in further work on the Strategy via workshop sessions.

The President thanked all of those that had been involved in the work on the Strategy to date.

## **26/08 Professional Services Programme**

### *Update on progress*

The Chief Operating Officer gave a verbal presentation to Council on the Professional Services Programme:

- The programme would support the Vision to 2040 but also needed to improve the current situation.
- There were lots of projects in flight, but the University needed data and benchmarking to inform the position. There had been no benchmarking of Professional Services carried out previously, and work around this would take place in March to include a multi-year analysis.
- [Redacted, section 43].
- There was a need for a prioritisation exercise to consider all of the projects across the University.
- The programme was considering dependencies and the accountability framework needed to be clearer.
- There would be an update at Scrutiny and Finance Committee on 23 February 2026 as well as, in due course, Audit Committee to consider mitigations for the biggest risks.

### Priorities for the Professional Services Programme

- All the projects identified were needed and had been categorised under a different framework. These were split into BAU, those that could be managed by one area, those that span across multiple areas, and those which were transformational.

- It was reported that the project around international card payments was progressing well, which would result in a saving [Redacted, section 43] by July 2026.
- A new system for managing the research profile (PURE) was in hand and this would help establish a more efficient way to manage research grants.
- Lots of the projects were around systems, and so a data strategy would start sooner than planned.
- Some projects were considered core work for running the institution, such as ways of working, organisational design, policies and procedures, and these would require further thinking.

Mr Milner asked where the three project offices were currently located. The Chief Operating Officer explained that they sat within Estates, DTS and Henley [Redacted, section 43].

The programme was aiming to prioritise work which was of most strategic importance to the University and rebuild activity around 4 sub-portfolios, which were still being considered.

Ms Maple asked about the previous rationalisation of the directorates and how this work fitted with that, and whether the University had the right skills for the Vision 2040. The Chief Operating Officer explained that the benchmarking exercise would help with this, as some areas did appear to be in the wrong place, [redacted, section 43]. Consideration would also be given to management of specialists by those with more general knowledge, a lack of resilience, and a lack of career pathways.

The Chief Operating Officer added that there were external influences that could be disruptive as well as student and parental expectations. It was important to move towards a service delivery model, which would include use of AI. Thought would need to be given as to the size of Professional Services, what could be automated, its location and its cost.

The Vice-Chancellor added that the creation of the Directorates was a first high level step and this more detailed work was now required as the Directorates were more embedded.

Mr Alexander noted the volume of projects both in train and coming through and asked how these would be managed to ensure the University was not overwhelmed by the demands from different areas about what they wanted. The Chief Operating Officer explained that she had created a Transformation Delivery Board with key leads below that. [Redacted, section 43]. There would also need to be thought around change management and helping sponsors understand their role in the leadership of the project.

Mr Milhofer asked if this would allow for some projects to be pushed ahead whilst others were paused and whether projects could move from one category to another. It was the intention to have a more agile response to project work and thinking across the whole institution on a quarterly basis to ensure the University was meeting the KPIs set. There would need to be a set of service metrics for the professional services areas.

Mr Corrigan asked about the University's current culture, where there were strengths and weaknesses and how difficult it would be to make changes. The Chief Operating Officer

explained that there was a need to see more staff data, analyses, and complete a segmentation of the workforce. She noted that some staff might have a wealth of experience whilst others might offer a more innovative approach with new ideas. Capacity was often an issue that could impact changes. The University needed to move away from some complicated governance processes. Overall, she noted that there were a lot of good staff and a willingness for change.

Mr Ali thanked the Chief Operating Officer for considering a new structure and bringing energy to this work. He asked what the University's capacity was for change. It was noted that in the last staff survey the University was not in the top quartile in terms of managing change, so this was an area that required improvement. There was a possibility of using the apprenticeship levy to upskill some staff and provide more e-learning workshops around managing change. Once changes had been implemented this could be reviewed year on year to ensure it was working that the University was responding to a changing environment.

The President thanked the Chief Operating Officer for her update and for the work she had put into this Programme.

#### **Resolved:**

[That the Council has received and noted the update on the progress of the Professional Services Programme given by the Chief Operating Officer](#)

#### *Management of Trusts*

Council received a paper proposing changes to the management of University Trusts, which included the National Institute for Research in Dairying (NIRD) Trust, the Greenlands Trust, the Beckett International Foundation and the Hugh Sinclair Trust. Council was the trustee of these four trusts. The Governance Review has found that the way the University managed these Trusts was not consistent and it was desirable for all of them to meet more regularly and have standard memberships.

Mr Milhofer questioned whether an identical approach was appropriate, given the difference in scale between the Trusts. The Vice-Chancellor explained that it was important that the Trust Committees were set up correctly even if meetings were short, to ensure that the appropriate management was in place if it was needed.

Dr Young Janet, who chaired the NIRD Trust Committee, welcomed the proposal to standardise the approach.

Council approved the proposed changes to the management of University Trusts.

#### **Resolved:**

[That the Council, acting as trustee, approved the proposed changes to the management of](#)

University Trusts, including the National Institute for Research in Dairying (NIRD) Trust, Hugh Sinclair Trust, Beckett International Foundation and the Greenlands Trust.

## 26/09 Reporting Pack 2025/26 Q1 Forecast

Council received a paper detailing the 2025-26 Q1 forecast. It was noted that:

- The revised Q1 forecast reporting pack endeavoured to provide financial information in a more meaningful format which could be more easily understood than before. Within the pack items marked in green indicated where performance was in line or better than budget or forecast, whilst items marked red indicated adverse performance to budget or forecast.
- A budgeted £-33.3m loss for 2025/26 had previously been approved by Council when the 2024/25 Q3 forecast projected a year end loss of £-31.6m. At the last Council, the Chief Financial Officer outlined the key drivers of the favourable variances to 2024/25 Q3 forecast with reference to the actual year end outturn loss position of £-18.8m. It was highlighted that many of favourable variances against 2024/25 Q3 forecast were associated with delays in staff recruitment and project phasing delays which had now unwound, and these would not deliver ongoing benefits during 2025-26. It was also highlighted that we would have the full year impact associated with 2024/25 pay award effective from July 2025 and the 2025-26 pay award from August 2025, as well as a full year impact from the increase in Employer National Insurance rates introduced in April 25, which together increase salary costs by c.£10m.
- [Redacted, section 43].
- [Redacted, section 43].
- It was noted that the University was fully compliant with all of its covenants during 2024/25 and forecast to remain do in our financial forecasts prepared to 2027/28.
- [Redacted, section 43]. The Chief Financial Officer was working with the Director of Estates to ensure that their budget was fully utilised in 2025/26 through bringing forward essential future Capex spend whilst the URS project was paused. A paper would be going to the next Scrutiny and Finance Committee which would report back on the optimal funding model recommendation to support the URS refurbishment.
- Investment fund performance was provided reporting that the main growth funds returned [redacted, section 43] in the first quarter to 31 Oct 25. Further, it was

confirmed that [redacted, section 43] of residential properties had been sold with their proceeds being invested in our Cazenove portfolio.

- [Redacted, section 43].
- The Chief Financial Officer confirmed that a new monthly management reporting pack would be published from the end of January 2026. It was anticipated that this would enable greater and more regular scrutiny of financial performance, allowing better control of salary and other expenditure costs. Consequently, it would be one of the key schedules in our plans to improve the ownership and understanding of financial performance for budget holders in order to deliver the University's return to financial surplus on a sustainable basis.
- [Redacted, section 43].
- 

Dr Young noted that the report was much easier to understand and thanked the Finance Team for its work on this. She asked about when the URS project was likely to restart, given the size of the project and the risk attached to it. The Chief Financial Officer explained that the project had been paused for 6 months in order to review the available funding alternatives for the project in order to recommend an optimal solution. A proposal would be provided at the next Scrutiny and Finance Committee and then shared with Council.  
[Redacted, section 43].

[Redacted, section 43].

Mr Milhofer noted that the report made it easier to understand the University's financial position and asked what other changes could be expected in the monthly management accounts pack. The Chief Financial Officer noted that changes would be made in phases to ensure that report developed meaningfully and a plan with a timetable of the proposed improvements/changes by each quarter would be shared. The Chief Financial Officer also wanted to ensure that the Scrutiny and Finance Committee and other users of the report had all they required and that key information previously provided had not been inadvertently omitted or diluted. It was also noted that there were some capacity issues within the Finance Team at present, with long serving senior members of staff with key institutional knowledge leaving. However, it remained a priority to refine the budgeting and forecasting processes. All Budget holders would be asked to submit and explain their proposed budgets, supported by their Finance business partners, in dedicated review meetings with the Executive Team with sufficient time allowed to ensure comprehensive

scrutiny prior to budget proposals being submitted to UEB, Scrutiny and Finance Committee, and Council.

The President thanked all of the Finance Team for its work on this and hoped that the changes would be helpful to budget holders as well as UEB and Council.

Council noted the overall financial position, in particular that close scrutiny of the cash position was needed moving forward.

**Resolved:**

[That the Council has received and noted the update by the Chief Financial Officer on the Q1 Forecast](#)

**Items for report**

**26/10 Report of the Vice-Chancellor**

The Council received and noted the report of the Vice-Chancellor.

The Vice-Chancellor reported that, as it was the University's Centenary year, there were a number of events being run which Council would be welcome to attend. University Court would be held on 17 March 2026, which marked 100 years since the University was awarded its Royal Charter. The Community Festival would be held on 16 May 2026 at the University and 17 May 2026 in Reading town centre. Last year saw around 8000 people attend, with an aim to increase this number to over 10,000 this year. The festival would include displays on research, music, charity work, student societies, and would serve food and drink.

The Council was pleased to hear that Professor Anna Horwood had been appointed Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in the New Year's Honours List and asked that its congratulations be passed on.

**Resolved :**

[That the Report of the Vice-Chancellor, so submitted, be received](#)

**26/11 Report of the Scrutiny and Finance Committee**

The Council received the Report of the Scrutiny and Finance Committee held on 5 January 2026.

Mr Corrigan noted the earlier concerns regarding the RCF but noted there was an action around this which Scrutiny and Finance Committee would take forward. The Committee

would undertake some work around KPIs that could be developed alongside the new reporting. The Committee had approved the establishment of a Reserves Policy. This was not mandatory but would help the University understand what a minimum or maximum reserve level should look like and where there was capacity for doing more or less. There was also some discussion around use of restricted versus unrestricted funds and what would fit with the Strategy of the University.

**Resolved:**

That the Report of the Scrutiny and Finance Committee, so submitted, be received

**26/12 Suggested Agenda Items for Council in 2025-26**

It was noted that any suggested items for discussion at future Council meetings should be provided to the President of the Council, or to the Secretary.

Mr Ali added that the presentation from [redacted, section 40] on segmentation had been very interesting and it would be useful to see a similar exercise from UEB on how to think about the customer journey and how this might affect the University's plans.

Dr Young asked for an update on the Estates and Digital Strategies – it was confirmed that this was due to be submitted to the March meeting.

Mr Corrigan asked if there was any appetite to have a session on investments, so Council could understand cash involved, what was drawn down and how the Investments Committee was ensuring that it was done responsibly. It was agreed that the President would speak with Mr Corrigan about this offline, as it could be included as part of a wider financial update in a future meeting.

**Resolved:**

That the paper on suggested items for future Council meetings, so submitted, be received.

***Items for note***

**26/13 Minutes (25/93 - 25/118) of the meeting held on 18 and 19 November 2025**

Minutes (25/93 – 25/118) of the meeting held on 18 and 19 November 2025 were confirmed as a correct record.

**26/14 Matters arising not elsewhere on the agenda, if any**

The Council noted that the Vice-Chancellor on behalf of UEB, and Mr Corrigan, on behalf of Scrutiny and Finance Committee, had approved the appointment of Emerita Professor Ginny Gibson as Chair to the Greenlands Trust Committee from 1 February 2026 for an initial period of 3 years.

## **Resolved:**

To note that the Vice-Chancellor, on behalf of UEB, and Mr Corrigan, on behalf of Scrutiny and Finance Committee, have approved the appointment of Emerita Professor Ginny Gibson as Chair to the Greenlands Trust Committee from 1 February 2026 for an initial period of 3 years.

## **26/15 Decisions taken by the President on behalf of the Council**

The Council noted that there was nothing to report on this occasion.

## **26/16 Documents sealed and to be sealed**

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

## **26/17 Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

## **26/18 Dates of meetings of the Council in Session 2025-26**

The remaining meetings of the Council for the Session 2025-26 had been scheduled for:

- Monday 9 March 2026 10.00am
- Wednesday 1 July 2026 10.00am

## **26/19 President to lead on brief reflections on the meeting of Council that has just concluded**

Members reflected in small groups on the business and nature of the discussions of the meeting, whether Council had the right information, heard the right voices, and whether the Council did justice to the major issues discussed.