

Council

23/17 A meeting of the Council was held in Room 201, Carrington Building, on Monday 13 March 2023 at 2.00 pm.

The President
The Vice-Presidents (Mr K. Corrigan and Mrs K. Owen)
The Vice-Chancellor
The Deputy Vice-Chancellor
The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Professor E.M. McCrum)
The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Professor M. Fellowes)
The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Professor D. Zaum)

Mr S. Alexander	Ms S. Maple
Mr S. Ali	Mr A. McCallum
Professor E. Beleska-Spasova (<i>vice</i> Professor J. Board)	Mr P. Milhofer
Mrs S. Butler	Mr O. Minto (<i>vice</i> Mr S. Allen)
Mrs P. Egan	Mrs S. Plank
Professor R. Frazier	Mr N. Richards
Professor J. Gibbins	Professor K. Strohfeldt
Mr J. Jack	Dr C. Shaw
Miss P. Lindsey	Dr J. Young

In attendance:

The Director of Finance
The Director of Quality Support and Development

Apologies were received from Mr S. Allen, Professor J. Board, and Dr R.J. Messer.

23/18 President's introductory remarks

The President welcomed Professor Katja Strohfeldt to her first meeting of the Council.

The President noted that Mr Allen, RUSU President, and Miss Lindsey, RUSU Welfare Officer, would complete their terms of office before the next meeting of Council. The Council thanked them for their invaluable contribution to Council and thanked all the RUSU Officers for all their work to support students and improve their experience at the University.

The President congratulated the Deputy Vice-Chancellor on her recent investiture to OBE.

The President expressed appreciation of the presentation on the University and league tables, given prior to the meeting by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education and Student Experience) (Professor P. Miskell) and the Head of Planning and Reporting.

23/19 Disclosure of Interests (Item 2)

The Council received a list of members' interests and members were asked to notify the Chief Strategy Officer and University Secretary of any amendments.

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Mr Milhofer gave notice that they had a conflict of interest in relation to the item of business on the Medical School (Minute23/30).

Matters for discussion and approval

23/20 Planning and Finances: context and overview (Item 3.1-3.3)

(a) The Council received the following background documents in relation to planning and financial matters:

- Introductory notes by the Vice-Chancellor
- Comments from the Scrutiny and Finance Committee
- A paper from the Director of Finance responding to matters raised by the Scrutiny and Finance Committee

(b) *Vice-Chancellor's introduction*

The Vice-Chancellor advised that, at this meeting, the Council was being asked to provide feedback on the Sustainable Planning System Report for 2022/23, endorse the proposed direction of travel, and thereby enable the development of the budget for 2023/24 and the final version of the five-year plan, which would be submitted for approval by Council in July.

The Vice-Chancellor reminded Council that, at its meeting in July 2022, it had set an expectation that budgets from 2023/24 onwards, following the end of the pandemic, would yield a surplus. The University Executive Board had worked towards this objective, but, due to the unexpected increase in the inflation rate over the past year, was now, with regret, proposing a deficit budget for 2023/24 and achievement of a surplus by 2026/27. UEB considered that the budget provided the basis for sustainable growth.

The Vice-Chancellor explained that, in the period to 2018, the University had rapidly increased its student numbers on the basis of a lower entry tariff, which had led to a decline in student satisfaction, in league table rankings, and in reputation, which, in turn, had made it more difficult to recruit students. This approach had risked a downward spiral. Following his appointment as Vice-Chancellor, the University had agreed a strategy which put in place a more sustainable model, prioritising the quality of the student intake and strengthening the University's reputation, together with measures to enhance research performance, achieve operational efficiencies, and renew development of commercial activity. Notwithstanding the challenges of the pandemic, the strategy was proving successful: the University had achieved the top 200 in the THE Global rankings and the top 30 in the Times league table, and was outperforming the sector and competitor institutions in undergraduate applications.

The Vice-Chancellor spoke of the current financial challenges, explaining that the 10% inflation rate added some £30m to the University's costs; he indicated that, whatever the

political complexion of the government following a general election, there was no prospect of an increase in the student fee or alternative measures to address the financial problems of the higher education sector.

The Vice-Chancellor explained that the University faced two options to address the current financial position:

- (i) Adopt a strategy of unconstrained growth in student numbers, with little regard to the quality of the intake or the capacity of colleges and the infrastructure, which would lead to a decline in the University's provision, reputation and future ability to recruit students; or
- (ii) Adopt a strategy of controlled student growth, which would maintain and strengthen the quality of our intake, our provision and reputation, support the retention of high-quality staff, and generate a virtuous cycle.

While option (a) might generate more income in the short-term and allow a reduced deficit in the budget, its consequences were damaging in the longer term and compromised the possibility of future growth. Option (b) implied that the University operated on a large deficit in 2023/24, but would protect the interests of the University in the longer term. The Vice-Chancellor explained that stringent restrictions on spending and discontinuation of some long-held ambitions were an integral part of the financial plans. Under the proposals, the University would return to a financially sustainable position within five years.

The Vice-Chancellor outlined the three key elements of the plan:

- (i) The University would define more explicitly the purpose of its investment portfolio, which had increased in value over the past five years and now stood at £291m. The Council had a statutory role in the responsible use of all the University's assets for its charitable purposes, which were education and research. It was proposed that the return of the proposed Investment Fund be used to support the University's operation with £10-15m per annum, while continuing to grow the fund.
- (ii) The University would significantly reduce its expenditure, while managing controlled student growth and strengthening the reputation of the University. Among other initiatives, a hardening of the vacancy freeze would reduce salary costs by £5m per annum, and plans for restructuring would be developed over the next 6 months to consider, amongst other things, School restructuring and Henley integration, with first savings to be delivered in 2024/25. The Strategic Foundation Programme would continue and the work on Professional Services would be accelerated. Other initiatives such as the Digital and Estates strategies and the India Office would proceed at a pace which was affordable. The University was committed to working constructively and transparently with the University and College Union and the Staff Forum, as it had on the Phase 1 agreement.
- (iii) Some projects, which would have helped to deliver some of the University's longer-term ambitions, would be abandoned, including the Medical School (costs in the region of £40-50m) and the Centenary Project (£10-15m).

The Vice-Chancellor recognised the challenges in delivering this programme and asked members of Council for their active support, inviting their contribution of relevant expertise and as critical friends.

In response to questions, the Vice-Chancellor indicated that he was aware of some 40 universities which had already proposed deficit budgets, including some prestigious institutions with a history of financial strength. Some universities without strong reserves were being required to make sweeping cuts.

(c) *Scrutiny and Finance Committee's observations*

Mr Corrigan, as Chair of the Scrutiny and Finance Committee, explained that the Committee had given careful consideration to the draft plan. He observed that it would be helpful if the report:

- (i) Defined more clearly how comprehensive its scope was and how far expenditure for already approved projects (such as the Strategic Foundation Programme and the Digital and Estates strategies) had been incorporated into the plan;
- (ii) Presented ranges of costs and income, where appropriate, based on variant assumptions, and explored more fully different assumptions and scenarios. This would allow Council to have a richer and more realistic understanding of the options and UEB's proposals;
- (iii) Provided further information on how the University's reserves could support initiatives, leverage additional income, and ensure the resilience of the plans;
- (iv) Strengthened its focus on strategic imperatives, such as decarbonisation, and on strategic opportunities for working with partners.

(d) *Director of Finance*

The Director of Finance noted the points raised by the Scrutiny and Finance Committee and undertook to address them in the revised planning report to be submitted to the Committee at its June meeting. He would develop a manageable number of meaningful scenarios, identify sensitivities, indicate tests which might be applied, and discuss levers which might be used to improve outcomes. Further feedback from the June meeting of the Scrutiny and Finance Committee could be taken into account for the submission of the final report to Council in July.

(e) *Discussion*

In response to questions, the Vice-Chancellor affirmed the importance of the support and commitment of colleagues across the University in developing and implementing solutions to the current financial challenges. The success of the Phase 1 agreement with the Staff Forum and University and College Union provided a model for working together to safeguard the future of the University and the interests of staff and students. While there would be differences in priorities between different groups, he believed that constructive collegial engagement offered the best prospect for avoiding long-term damage and for creating a sustainable future for the University. The Vice-Chancellor considered that elements of restructuring would necessarily form part of the solution and that a measured and consultative approach would be most effective.

In response to further questions, the Director of Finance assured Council that the scenarios would include reference to practicability and organisational nimbleness, and that in developing scenarios consideration would be given to international contexts and markets.

The Director of Finance clarified that the development of Loddon Garden Village was not an approved project and therefore had not been included in the plans.

23/21 Investment Fund (Item 3.4)

The Council received a paper containing an overview of the University's investment assets and a proposal to create an Investment Fund.

Mr Corrigan, as chair of the Investments Committee, expressed his confidence that the Committee was overseeing the investment portfolio and fulfilling its fiduciary obligations conscientiously and effectively, but considered that a more active alignment of the investment strategy with the University's purposes would yield greater value for the University, its research and educational activities and the experience of its students. The Committee had concluded that the University's investment assets should be considered more holistically rather than parcel by parcel. Mr Corrigan confirmed that the Scrutiny and Finance Committee, to which Investments Committee reported, had endorsed this proposal.

The Director of Finance commented on the overview of assets, referring to accounting standards, the distinction between investment and operational assets, and the growth in the value of the University's investments.

In response to questions, the Director of Finance acknowledged the contending arguments for using capital to pay down debt or to hold investments. He explained that much of the University's debt comprised long-term loans, some of which were subject to prohibitively costly repayment terms; however, the issue was kept under review.

The Council discussed aspects of the University's investment strategy, including asset allocation, targeted rates of return, spend rate, and commitment to long-term growth.

The Council endorsed the proposal for the creation of an Investment Fund.

23/22 Financial Quarter 2 Report (Item 3.5)

The Council received the Financial Quarter 2 Report.

The Vice-Chancellor reported that the agreed pay settlement was a 5% increase for the majority of staff and an 8% increase for low earners; 2% would be paid in the current financial year. He explained that some universities had decided not to pay part of the settlement in the current financial year, but the University had decided that it was appropriate to do so, recognising the financial pressures on staff and the need for the University to retain and attract staff in a competitive job market. He noted that the University and College Union nationally was continuing to pursue a 13.5% increase in pay, while the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) now considered the 2022/23 pay negotiations closed.

In response to questions, the Director of Finance indicated that he believed that there would be some improvement by the year end and the final position would be a deficit of -£16m. He explained that the University was very prudent in its cashflow planning and subjected forecasts to multiple tests.

23/23 Report of the Five-year Planning Process (Item 3.6)

The Council received the Report of the Five-year Planning Process.

The Vice-Chancellor noted that Council was invited at this meeting to provide feedback on the report and to endorse its direction of travel. Council would be invited to approve a revised version at its meeting in July.

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Planning and Resource) (Professor Fellowes) explained that the Planning and Change Board had found this year's five-year planning round extremely challenging and, working within the framework of the University Strategy, had made difficult decisions. The plan made provision for a -£30.7 deficit in 2023/24, but enabled the University to achieve a break-even position by 2025/26 and a surplus by 2026/27. It sought to protect the University's reputation, which depended primarily on the quality of its education and research, and to avoid short-term decisions which would compromise growth and sustainability in the medium and long term. He referred to the plight of some other universities which, without significant financial reserves, were having to make immediate and deep cuts, which almost inevitably would compromise the quality of their student experience, and thereby damage their reputation, which, in turn, set at risk their capacity for recovery and growth.

Members of Council variously raised points for consideration in the review of the plan, including:

- Significant restructuring should be considered since salami-slicing budgets and a staff recruitment freeze would mean that resource was not aligned to the University's priorities.
- The University was attempting to deliver an unrealistic number of projects given the capacity and resource constraints and should consider radical rationalisation and prioritisation.
- Given the size of the proposed deficit, the University's longstanding challenge in generating a surplus from its core activities, and the structural issues with the UK higher education sector, the University needed to identify radical solutions, otherwise savings would be short-term and costs would soon return. However, such solutions needed to be consistent with the requirements of the government, regulators, research funders, and the student market.
- Given that the income from Home student fees and from research did not cover the costs of these activities, increasing recruitment of international students would be necessary for any financial improvement.
- Achieving efficiencies which enabled the University to deliver high quality education within the standard Home fee and world-leading research with full cost recovery was essential to the University's financial sustainability.
- The appropriate balance between Home and International students and between different subject areas should be kept under review in the light of financial factors.
- Research was fundamental to the purpose, reputation and financial viability of the University—research drove international rankings, which, in turn, drove international recruitment.
- Resource to support research needed to be directed where it could have the maximum impact.
- Standardising processes and sharing services with other universities might be one model for achieving long-term efficiencies. There was some scepticism about the viability of such an arrangement in the light of VAT implications; however, the possibility should be explored.
- While clearly the University's reserves were a source of strength, there was a risk that they disincentivised change which might be necessary and productive. Other institutions without a financial cushion might be driven to restructure, change their

operating model, achieve major efficiencies, and thereby become a more competitive institution. The University needed to adapt to the challenging external environment, become leaner, and develop an operating model which consistently generated a surplus.

- Data indicated that the University had a higher number of professional services staff than its competitors and the sector average. Consideration needed to be given to the reasons for this and how professional staffing might be reduced. It should, however, be recognised that professional staff played a significant role in providing a high-quality student experience—they were often directly responsible for teaching students (for example, technicians instructing in laboratory classes) and were critical to supporting well-being. Cuts in professional services staff would probably lead to transfer of administrative work to academics, which was expensive and demoralising, and could lead to the loss high-flying academic staff.
- Efficiencies could be achieved by addressing a range of systemic issues, for example, by undertaking comprehensive process reviews, layering of decision-making, and more effective performance management.
- Staff morale was critical to delivery of a high-quality student experience, which, in turn, was critical to the University's reputation and student recruitment. It was also a key enabler of change.
- While cost control and good housekeeping were important, there could be a greater focus on income generation, for example through more aggressive marketing and development of apprenticeships and other initiatives.
- It would be helpful if the report explained the opportunities lost and the extent of UEB's concerns in proposing the cancellation or deprioritisation of projects.

The President invited lay members of Council to reflect on how they might contribute their expertise to the further development of the plan.

The Council agreed to endorse the direction of travel set out in the five-year plan, provided that the position became cash-positive in the fourth year. The five-year plan would be revised in the light of Council's comments and submitted to Council at its meeting in July.

The Council considered that the specific recommendations set out in Appendix B were an operational rather than a governance matter and therefore referred them to University Executive Board for decision.

23/24 Report of the Scrutiny and Finance Committee (Item 3.7)

The Council received a Report of the Scrutiny and Finance Committee in respect of the development of Thames Valley Science Park (TVSP) and the collaboration with the Natural History Museum.

The Vice-Chancellor noted that in September 2020 the Council had received and approved a paper on a collaboration with the Natural History Museum, including the development of a repository on University land at TVSP. It had recently become apparent that the NHM's operational plans for the transfer of its collections to the repository could prejudice the timing of a potential development on an adjacent parcel of land. In order to protect the option to develop the land within the next seven years, it would be necessary to increase infrastructure provision for the NHM project at an additional cost of £8.5m.

In response to questions, the Vice-Chancellor explained that a range of financial models could be adopted to support the further development of TVSP and the University kept alternative

models under review. Under any model, maintaining constructive relationships with the local planning authority and with the surrounding community were priorities.

Resolved:

“That:

1. The following papers, now submitted, be received:
 - Comments from the Scrutiny and Finance Committee
 - A paper from the Director of Finance responding to matters raised by the Scrutiny and Finance Committee
 - Financial Quarter 2 Report;
2. (a) A paper containing an overview of investment assets, now submitted, be received; and
(b) A proposal to create an Investment Fund, now submitted, be approved;
3. (a) The Report on the outcome of the Five-Year Planning Process 2023, now submitted, be received;
(b) The direction of travel, outlined in the Report, namely that there be a deficit budget in 2023/24, be endorsed, pending a final decision on the budget by Council at its meeting in July 2023;
(c) The recommendations contained in the Report, Appendix B, in relation to posts and non-staff spending, be noted and referred to the University Executive Board for decision;
4. (a) A Report from Scrutiny and Finance Committee on collaboration with the Natural History Museum (NHM), now submitted, be approved;
(b) A proposal for the disposal of up to 2.66ha (6.57ac) of land on a long leasehold (200 years) basis, now submitted, be approved;
(c) A budget request of circa £368k in advance of agreement for lease in order to progress site feasibility and drafting of legal documents, now submitted, be approved;
(d) A budget request of circa £1.3m to progress the planning application for the Spine Road, now submitted, be approved;
(e) A request to ringfence £8.5m of the lease premium to fund construction of the new Spine Road to create access to the NHM site, now submitted, be approved.”

23/25 Academic quality in education (Item 4.1)

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education and Student Experience) (Professor McCrum) gave a presentation on academic quality in education, and the RUSU Education Officer (Mr Minto) gave a presentation on quality from the perspective of students.

Professor McCrum outlined the external framework which assured the quality of UK higher education, referring to the Office for Students (OfS) and its regulatory requirements and to the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), which developed and maintained sector reference points for quality and standards. The OfS monitored and evaluated higher education providers against a set of thresholds (for baseline regulation) and benchmarks (for the Teaching Excellence Framework) relating to student outcomes, namely continuation (students progressing from their first to their second year of study), completion (students achieving a higher education qualification), and progression (graduates achieving positive career/further study outcomes).

Data was analysed in relation to the various levels of study/award and, in greater detail, to demographic characteristics and subjects ('split metrics'). The OfS also considered providers' performance in the National Students Survey (NSS) in the TEF. Internally, the University closely monitored its academic quality and standards with reference to these various measures and to degree classifications; a summary of its analysis and resulting actions were reported annually to Council in the Annual Learning and Teaching Report and, in addition, an assessment of undergraduate degree outcomes and standards was published periodically in the Degree Outcomes Statement.

Professor McCrum reported that the proportion of 'good degrees' (Firsts and 2:1s) had returned to pre-pandemic levels, spoke of academic integrity and pedagogy in relation to ChatGPT and artificial intelligence, and explained how decolonising the curriculum helped to address the awarding gap. She affirmed the University's commitment to working with students to improve the quality of their education.

Mr Minto explained that students generally did not have a keen awareness of the processes which assured the standards of their award, but they believed that the processes were fair and took the quality (and credibility) of their degree and classification for granted. As a Course Rep and now as the RUSU Education Officer and as a member of the OfS's Student Panel, he was more aware of the regulatory framework and processes and sought to represent students' perspectives and interests on these matters.

Having outlined some of the principles and processes in relation to quality and standards, Mr Minto considered 'grade inflation and awarding gaps. He noted that the sector's reversion to pre-pandemic levels of 'good degrees' had been accompanied by an increase in the awarding gap between White and BAME, and White and Black, students. There was a need for better understanding across the sector about the factors contributing to increases (and declines) in 'good degrees', how far increases related to improved practices, and equally the specific factors which drove the awarding gap. The University (and other higher education providers) were trying to understand these factors, and the OfS's Teaching Excellence Framework and Access and Participation Plan exercises provided an opportunity to gather information on different approaches. Work on this would build stronger confidence among providers, regulators, the public and students in the standards of awards and their fairness.

Mr Minto noted that periodically, in response to concerns about grade inflation, there was discussion of changing the basis of classification to a norm-referenced model where the proportion of Firsts, 2:1s, etc, was prescribed. Mr Minto indicated that this would be perceived as unjust since a student's classification would depend not on their own efforts and performance, but on performance relative to the rest of the cohort with variations in the quality of a First or 2:1 from year to year. He affirmed the importance of retaining a criteria-referenced classification system, where consistent standards were applied from cohort to cohort and students were classified in accordance with their absolute achievement.

In response to questions, Professor McCrum explained that the OfS's more detailed analysis of student outcomes generated several hundreds of data points ('split metrics') and that almost all providers were likely to fall below threshold in some metrics. The University had fallen below threshold in relation to Integrated Master's programmes (and specifically to the MPharm, which accounted for the majority of Integrated Master's provision), and was addressing the factors associated with underperformance.

In response to further questions, Mr Minto indicated that Schools offered students an outline of quality assurance processes, but generally at the beginning of their programme when

students were overwhelmed with information. Students' general lack of awareness of quality assurance was a sector-wide phenomenon. He agreed that it would be interesting to explore more systematically students' awareness of, and trust in, the processes which underpinned their awards.

23/26 Annual Report on Learning and Teaching (Item 4.2)

The Council received the Annual Learning and Teaching Report (Spring Term 2023), together with Senate's comments on the Report.

The Council noted that the discussion of the previous item had addressed issues identified in the Report.

Resolved:

"That the University Annual Learning and Teaching Report for Council (Spring Term 2023), now submitted, be approved."

23/27 Report of the Senate (Item 5)

The Council received the Report of the meeting of the Senate held on 1 March 2023.

Resolved:

"That:

1. The Degree Outcomes Statement 2022, now submitted, be approved;
2. The Statement on monitoring of undergraduate, taught postgraduate and postgraduate research programmes, now submitted, be approved;
3. The Report of the meeting of the Senate held on 1 March 2023, now submitted, be approved."

23/28 Facility agreement of the NIRD Trust (Item 6)

The Council received a paper relating to the draft facility agreement of the NIRD Trust.

The Vice-Chancellor reminded Council that, at its meeting on 4 July 2022, it had agreed a series of resolutions concerning the NIRD Trust, acting as itself and as the Trustee of the NIRD Trust. In particular, Council had resolved that the content of the Term Sheet detailing a loan of £60m be approved and be set out in the final loan arrangement. It had subsequently been necessary to make a number of changes to the Term Sheet, prompted by the instability of the bond market in autumn 2022 on which the interest rate of the loan was based. Following discussions between the University and the NIRD Trust Committee, and following independent financial advice being taken by the NIRD Trust Committee, some changes had been agreed, and these were now submitted to Council, via University Executive Board, for its final approval.

Resolved:

“The Council received and considered the paper dated 23 February 2022 [in error for 2023] with annexures from Legal Services regarding the National Institute for Research in Dairying Trust (NIRD Trust) (“the Paper”). The Council noted that it was acting in its capacity as University Council and as Trustee of the NIRD Trust and therefore that it was considering the best interests of the NIRD Trust as well as those of the University. The Council also took into account the matters agreed between the two committees established to seek resolution of the issues as previously reported to Council and the resolutions of Council acting as itself and as the Trustee of the NIRD Trust made on 4 July 2022.

(a) Resolved (by the Council acting as a Trustee of the National Institute for Research in Dairying Trust):

- That the Trustee accepts the terms of the draft Facility Agreement; and
- That these arrangements shall take effect promptly following the date on which the Charity Commission approves them.

(b) Resolved:

- That the Council notes the appointment by the President of the Council of Kevin Corrigan as Chair to the University Negotiating Committee;
- That the Council accepts the terms of the draft Facility Agreement;
- That these arrangements shall take effect promptly following the date on which the Charity Commission approves them; and
- That the University’s officers be empowered to take all necessary steps to implement these Resolutions without further reference to Council, subject only to (i) the Charity Commission first approving these proposals and making any required order; (ii) UKRI (as successor to the BBSRC) being consulted in accordance with the NIRD Trust and giving its approval to the proposed settlement mechanisms; and (iii) any other legally advised measures to enable implementation.”

23/29 Report of the Appointments and Governance Committee (Item 7)

The Council received a Report of the Appointments and Governance Committee.

Resolved:

“That:

1. Peter Milhofer fill the vacancy (*vice* Tom Beardmore-Gray) for a lay member of Council on Student Experience Committee for a period coterminous with his tenure on Council;
2. Steve Alexander fill the vacancy (*vice* Chris Shaw) for a lay member of Council on Student Experience Committee for a period coterminous with his tenure on Council;
3. Richard Frazier be added to the membership of Student Experience Committee for a period up to 31 July 2025.”

23/30 Decision not to pursue a medical school (Item 8)

The Council received a report on the University Executive Board’s decision not to pursue further at this stage the establishment of a medical school.

The Council expressed its support for this decision and commended its realism about feasibility of such a development at this stage. The Council affirmed the importance of the partnership with the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust and the collaborations on education and research, including the use of big data for healthcare.

In response to a question, the Vice-Chancellor advised that a joint statement would be issued within the next few days. Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust respected the rationale for the decision and welcomed the clarification, which allowed the Trust to consolidate collaborations with medical schools in the region.

Resolved:

“That:

1. A paper on Revisiting the Medical School Roadmap, now submitted, be received:
2. The decision of the University Executive Board not to pursue a Medical School be endorsed.”

Matters for report

23/31 Report of the Student Experience Committee (Item 9.1)

The Council received the Report of the meeting of the Student Experience Committee held on 30 January 2023.

Mrs Owen, as Chair of the Committee, thanked the RUSU officers for their energy and commitment in fulfilling their roles, improving the student experience, and contributing to the success of the Student Experience Committee over the past year.

She advised that the Committee was considering safeguarding and consent and would report on this work to Council at its July meeting.

In response to a question on RUSU’s disaffiliation from the National Union of Students, Miss Lindsey explained that an increasing number of students’ unions were disaffiliating, and that RUSU had joined with other students’ unions in the south to form a consortium to provide a collective voice for students.

Resolved:

“That the Report of the Student Experience Committee held on 30 January 2023, now submitted, be approved.”

23/32 Report of the Students’ Union (Item 9.2)

The Council received an oral report by the RUSU Welfare Officer (Miss Lindsey) and RUSU Education Officer (Mr Minto) on RUSU’s recent activities.

Miss Lindsey and Mr Minto reported that:

- RUSU had held its leadership elections. A total of 86 candidates had offered themselves for 44 roles, with a voter turnout of 1,900 students and 11,591 votes cast.

- The campaign to combat sexual harassment had been launched.
- Following a rebranding project, RUSU had decided to change its name to Reading Students' Union (RSU), had articulated more succinctly its purpose, vision, mission and values, and had refreshed its visual identity.
- The Cost of Living campaign was proving successful—the provision of subsidised breakfasts had been warmly welcomed by students and some 28 students had benefited from assistance with membership fees and purchase of kit for sports clubs.
- The RUSU Students Sustainability Summit, held in January and based on the UN Sustainable Development goals, had been well-attended, had included a range of student and external speakers, and had provided a forum for lively debate.

Miss Lindsey, on behalf of the RUSU officers, thanked Council for their support for RUSU and for their careful consideration and promotion of the student experience.

23/33 Report of the Vice-Chancellor (Item 10)

The Council received the Report of the Vice-Chancellor.

The Vice-Chancellor drew attention to the following matters:

- (a) The University and College Union had called another six days of strikes over a period of two weeks and was currently holding a ballot on a marking and assessment boycott to begin in April. The 2023 valuation of the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) was imminent, as required by law, and was expected to be more positive than the previous valuation; on the basis of the December monitoring of the USS investments, the USS Trustees had indicated that they thought it possible to restore benefits to the pre-2020 valuation levels while at the same time reducing the combined contribution from staff and employers from 30% to 25.2%. Such a outcome would need to be based on the formal 2023 valuation which has a census date of 31 March 2023, and required formal consultation with the USS members. He hoped that this offered the prospect of a resolution.
- (b) The University Executive Board had approved a feasibility group to plan for the refurbishment of the URS Building, which was the first major capital project in the new five-year Estates Strategy. The refurbished space would become home to the School of the Built Environment and would provide a significant extension to the University's teaching space, which was essential for planned growth in student numbers. The feasibility group was also a pre-requisite for proposed work to secure the future of the Chancellor's Building. Council should expect the full plan for the URS building in the summer of 2024.
- (c) The UEB had agreed to proceed with the purchase of some parcels of farmland which had been offered off-market, subject to meeting a tight timeframe. The cost fell within the range for UEB approval. The land would replace some of the farmland lost due to the development of TVSP and was expected to increase significantly in value in the long term.

Resolved:

“That the Report of the Vice-Chancellor, now submitted, be received.”

23/34 Minutes (23/01-22/16) of the meeting held on 24 January 2023 (Item 11)

The Minutes (23/01-22/16) of the meeting held on 24 January 2023 were confirmed and signed.

23/35 Documents sealed and to be sealed (Item 13)

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

Resolved:

"That the Council approve the action taken by the Officers and Members in affixing the University Seal to documents sealed since the last Ordinary Meeting of the Council and authorise the Seal of the University to be affixed to the documents to be sealed as now reported."

23/36 Rolling update on topics for future Council meetings (Item 14)

The Council received an update on topics for future Council meetings.

23/37 Dates of meetings of the Council in the Session 2022/23 (Item 16)

The final meeting of the Council in the Session 2022/23 had been scheduled for:

Monday 3 July 2023 at 2.15 pm.

23/38 Reflections on the meeting (Item 17)

The President invited members to share with her later their reflections on this and previous meetings this academic year.