

Council

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

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

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

In attendance:

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

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

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

Items for note

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

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

21/60 Council Standing Orders (Item 4.2)

The Council noted the Council Standing Orders.

21/61 Disclosure of Interests (Item 4.3)

The Council noted a paper from the University Secretary in regard to Disclosure of Interests. The Council received a list of members' interests and members were asked to notify the University Secretary of any amendments as a matter of urgency.

21/62 Freedom of Speech Annual Report (Item 4.4)

The Council received the Freedom of Speech Annual Report.

21/63 Report on the Exercise of Vacation Powers (Item 4.5)

The Council noted that there had been no occasion to exercise the Vacation Powers.

21/64 Availability of Council Papers (Item 4.6)

The Council noted a paper from the University Secretary and Chief Strategy Officer in regard to the availability of Council papers. He confirmed that the heading of section 2(b) should read 'Staff' rather than 'Academic Staff'.

21/65 Documents sealed and to be sealed (Item 4.7)

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

21/66 Matters approved by the President since the last meeting (Item 4.8)

The President reported that, on behalf of the Council, he had approved a proposal from the University Executive Board that a Consultation Group be established to review the provision of University Cleaning Services, and that Mrs S. Plank be appointed as the lay member on that group.

Resolved:

1. "That the Freedom of Speech Annual Report, now submitted, be received."
2. "That the Council approve the action taken by the Officers and Members in affixing the University Seal to documents sealed since the last Ordinary Meeting of the Council and authorise the Seal of the University to be affixed to the documents to be sealed as now reported."

Main items of business: strategic and governance matters for discussion

21/67 Presentation from Technical Services (Item 5)

Mr John Jack, Senior Technician-Teaching and Research, delivered a presentation on the work of Technical Services and its contribution to the University and to the sector.

Mr Jack explained that Technical Services comprised 120 technicians, who were specialists in the practical support of teaching and research in sciences and the arts, including professional health and safety co-ordinators; they were located across the London Road and Whiteknights campuses and the University farms. They supported some 2,000 practical classes each year, which involved laying out, demonstrating in, and running, practicals, and developing and trialling innovative techniques for their delivery. Staff were highly qualified, including at doctoral level, and many had professional recognition as Fellows or Associate Fellows of the Higher Education Academy.

Mr Jack spoke of the leading role which the University's Technical Services played in the sector, promoting professional development and status of technicians. The University was a founder signatory of the Technician Commitment, a sector-wide initiative led by the Science Council to enhance the visibility, career development, and recognition of technicians. In 2017, the Science Council had awarded the University Employer Champion Status. The University was a member of the Trailblazer group for a newly approved HE Assistant Technician Apprenticeship Standard, and was collaborating with four other universities and the National Technician Development Centre to pilot an online tool for implementing the Laboratory Efficiency Assessment Framework. Andy Whittam, Technical Manager-Operations, had been shortlisted for the THE Outstanding Technician of the Year Award 2021 for his exceptional contribution to environmental sustainability and the sustainability of technical skills.

In response to questions, Mr Jack explained that sustainability was central to the ethos of Technical Services and would remain a priority when external funding for specific initiatives ceased. He spoke of the strong *esprit de corps* across Technical Services, notwithstanding its staff being widely dispersed in Schools and buildings across the campuses, and he paid tribute to the leadership of Dr Karen Henderson, Director of Technical Services, in fostering a dynamic, mutually supportive community, which was attentive to the needs of the University and well-regarded in the profession. The role of technician was personally fulfilling and offered rich opportunities for development and career progression.

The Council thanked Mr Jack warmly for his illuminating account of the work of Technical Services.

21/68 Presentation from Professor A. Charlton-Perez, Head of School, Mathematical, Physical and Computational Sciences, on the University's part in COP26 (Item 6)

Professor Andrew Charlton-Perez, Head of School, Mathematical, Physical and Computational Sciences, gave a presentation on the University's contribution to COP26.

Professor Charlton-Perez referred Council to a comprehensive listing of the University's activities at COP26 at <https://www.reading.ac.uk/planet/cop26>. The University had official observer status at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which was managed through the Walker Institute. The Walker Institute had focussed in the COP on building strategic relationships with countries, non-governmental organisations and inter-governmental organisations, and had, for example, supported countries in the Africa pavilion in negotiating text on the global adaptation goal and access to finance. The University's most direct influence on the work of the COP was its contribution to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which was the primary source of scientific analysis for the COP; the University had the most lead authors of any single institution in the world. It was notable that science had been more central to COP26 and its final declaration than to previous COPs.

Professor Charlton-Perez referred to the prominence of the ‘climate stripes’ around the conference and its reporting, including every BBC COP story; the stripes had been developed by Professor Ed Hawkins, Professor of Climate Science, as a graphic representation of climate change. Professor Charlton-Perez spoke of the University’s involvement in a number of talks in the science pavilion, the University’s leadership of initiatives launched at the COP, and the influence of the University’s scientists on policy development, including through secondment to the Cabinet Office. The University’s Marketing and Communications team had run a very successful campaign (Partnering for the Planet) which had provided public communications about the University’s work before and during the COP. The University had also been involved in the UK Universities COP26 network.

Professor Charlton-Perez explained that, within the frame of COP, the University had developed an initiative to bring about significant change in climate education in schools and colleges in the UK. The first national climate education summit had been held in September 2021 with more than 600 attendees and had led to a national climate education action plan, developed in partnership with the Department for Education (DfE) and many others. The University had supported the DfE in their launch of a new strategy consultation on climate education.

In response to questions, Professor Charlton-Perez indicated that COP26 had made significant progress, but that the commitments agreed needed to be translated into action. He spoke of the potential for closer collaboration with the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF), the strength which would come from joint work on climate adaptation, and the positive impact of such work on the most vulnerable communities on the planet. He referred to the University’s partnership with Microsoft to develop a digital twin of climate systems [Section 43]

The President thanked Professor Charlton-Perez for his presentation and praised the inspiring work on climate change being undertaken across the University.

21/69 European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF) business case (Item 7)

The Council received the business case for the relocation of the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts headquarters to the Whiteknights campus.

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) (Professor Zaum) reminded the Council that the relocation of ECMWF to the Whiteknights campus would create the largest cluster of climate and weather scientists in the world, which would have enormous benefits for climate research and enable the University to have even greater impact on key issues for the planet. The business case comprised three interlinked projects:

- (a) **Working with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS)** to develop a proposal for ECMWF Council, which was effectively an influencing project to support the UK government in making an offer acceptable to ECMWF. The UK government recognised the importance and value of retaining ECMWF in the UK and had agreed to cover the building costs for the headquarters. While the UK’s offer was generous and the only proposal on the table, the ECMWF Council might delay a decision given the current context of political tensions between the UK and European countries; a delay would create further uncertainty, create opportunities for other countries to develop alternative offers, and increase the eventual costs of the project if it were to proceed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Resolved:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mr Knowles spoke of his work to develop a 'people's fair' to create networking opportunities to support students' employability and the successful introduction of a late-night bus service from RUSU to improve student safety and minimise potential disturbance to the local community. He also reported that the RUSU Education Officer was developing guidance to students on how to use Linked-in in securing a job post-graduation and had been contributing to the University's development of a self-certification process for exceptional circumstances. The RUSU Activities Officer had been co-ordinating a Culture Show, which offered faith and culture-based groups the opportunity to share some aspect of their culture, and had been promoting the role of Diversity and Inclusion Rep in clubs and societies.

In response to questions, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education and Student Experience) (Professor McCrum) explained that some aspects of the NSS2021 results had surprised the University: the University had felt that it had supported students well during the pandemic, that the arrangements put in place had been generous within the constraints of programme structures, and that the actions taken were broadly in line with, if not better than, much of the sector. Given that the University had not anticipated such a negative outcome, it was working with the RUSU Welfare Officer and Education Officer to review its early warning mechanisms and identify more dynamic ways of gathering student feedback in real time, which might include pulse surveys, interrogating more effectively social media for student comment, and closer engagement with student reps. She also indicated that the University was revising how it communicated with students to ensure that key messages could be issued more quickly and in a more user-friendly way, for example by adopting a more 'layered' approach with simpler top-level messages and with more detailed and segment-specific information available through weblinks. Miss Loweth and Mr Knowles advised that RUSU was also working with the University's Marketing Communication and Engagement section to optimise communication and engagement with students. RUSU was hoping to initiate engagement with prospective students at open days and to maintain some level of contact over the following months.

In response to further questions, Miss Loweth explained that students were often reluctant to report incidents of sexual harassment, and that RUSU and the University were working together to review procedures and support with a view to giving students greater confidence that processes were user-friendly and effective. Miss Loweth indicated that the increase in

reported incidents was probably due to increased reporting rather than an actual increase in incidents. The University Secretary and Chief Strategy Officer advised that the Office for Students would require, as part of the University's annual return, information on reported cases, and that the Student Experience Committee would be asked to review the data annually in order to inform the Council's consideration of the report.

Mrs Owen noted that Professor Park was standing down from his role as Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education and Student Experience) and paid tribute to his work and achievements over the past two years, both in sustaining high-quality education and student experience through the acute phase of the pandemic and in establishing strong foundations for longer term developments.

Resolved:

“That the Report of the meeting of the Student Experience Committee held on 4 November 2021, now submitted, be approved.”

Matters for approval

21/71 Report of the Audit Committee (Item 9)

The Council received the Annual Report of the Audit Committee to the Council and the Vice-Chancellor for 2020/21.

In the absence of Mr Richards, Chair of the Committee, Mr Milhofer reported that the University's risk management, management controls, and governance had been satisfactory or good, and had proven effective in the face of the particularly challenging circumstances of the pandemic. In addition, the measures in place to promote Value for Money were satisfactory, based on audit findings in February 2021. (The annual Value for Money report to 31 July 2021 had not been available for consideration by Audit Committee in November 2021.)

Mr Milhofer spoke of the changing nature of IT risks and the University's commitment of additional resource to strengthen its cybersecurity measures.

Mr Milhofer advised that the external auditor had not yet produced a final or draft version of their report. It was understood that the delay was not attributable to particular issues identified in the course of the audit. The Council noted that such a delay was highly unusual and unsatisfactory. In response to questions, the Chief Financial Officer explained that the legal end date for submission of accounts was 31 March, but the University was required to submit data to the Office for Students by 31 January; she was confident that Deloitte would provide their report before the end of January.

The Chief Financial Officer noted that Deloitte's initial four-year term as external auditors was due to end in May 2022. [Section 43] a decision on the appointment of the external auditor should be made not later than January 2022. The Council delegated to the Audit Committee authority to appoint an external auditor.

It was noted that a reference in the Annual Report to Council's 'six principal committees' should be amended to 'five' (p. 57).

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

Resolved:

1. "That the financial position of the University for 2020/21, the financial statements and the audit report, now submitted, be noted and approved for signature by the President, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Financial Officer."
2. "That the Vice-Chancellor or Chief Financial Officer as appropriate be authorised to sign the letters of support for the University's subsidiary companies."

Matters for report

21/72 Report of the Senate (Item 10)

The Council received the Report of the meeting of the Senate held on 3 November 2021.

The Vice-Chancellor reported that, in accordance with good practice, the Senate conducted a review of its effectiveness every five years. Since the last review had been in 2016/17, the Senate had approved the establishment of a review in the current academic year. Under one of its terms of reference, the review would consider, in conjunction with Council, how Senate could provide assurance on academic governance and standards, and how Council and Senate could work most effectively together; a sub-group, to be chaired by the Senate member on Council (Professor Frazier) and including members from both Senate and Council, would be formed to address this matter and would report both to the Senate Review Group and to Council. Any member of Council interested in serving on the sub-group should contact the University Secretary and Chief Strategy Officer.

The Senate's discussion of the ECMWF business case had been considered under Minute 21/69.

Resolved:

"That the Report of the meeting of the Senate held on 3 November 2021, now submitted, be approved."

21/73 Report of the Vice-Chancellor (Item 11)

The Council received the Report of the Vice-Chancellor.

The Vice-Chancellor thanked Council members for their helpful discussion on the Strategic Action Plan on the previous evening and invited them to consider, in the light of that discussion, the projects in the Action Plan to which they might most effectively contribute their expertise and skills. They were asked to discuss their particular areas of interest during their appraisal with a Vice-President.

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

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

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

Resolved:

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

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

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

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

[Section 43]

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

21/75 Report of the Appointments and Governance Committee (Item 13)

The Council received the Report of the meeting of the Appointments and Governance Committee held on 18 October 2021.

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

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

Consideration of the process for appointing a new President following the completion of Dr Preston's term was deferred to later in the meeting (see Minute 21/77).

Resolved:

1. "That Council recruit to two vacancies in its membership early in 2022 such that one could begin as soon as possible and one could begin on 1 August 2022."
2. "That a fixed-term appointment of a Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education and Student Experience) (*vice* Professor J.R. Park), to start on 1 January 2022 for a six-year period from the date of appointment, be advertised internally only."
3. "That Professor P. Yaqoob be appointed Deputy Vice-Chancellor for a further two-year period from 1 January 2022."
4. "That the President of Council be authorised to sign the Prevent return on behalf of the Council for submission to the Office for Students."
5. "That the Report of the meeting of the Appointments and Governance Committee, held on 18 October 2021, now received, be approved."

21/76 Report of the Remuneration Committee (Item 14)

Members of the University Executive Board recused themselves from the discussion of this item and withdrew from the meeting.

The Council received the Report of the meeting of the Remuneration Committee, held on 18 October 2021, and the Annual Report of the Remuneration Committee 2020/21.

Mr Beardmore-Gray, as Chair of the Committee, advised that the Vice-Chancellor continued to decline the normal salary for his role. The Council considered the Vice-Chancellor's stance on this matter to be highly honourable and noted that his refusal of the full financial reward for his role was clearly stated in the University's annual report and on the University's website. The Council recognised that the University would need to revert to a competitive economic rate for the role on the eventual appointment of Professor Van de Noort's successor.

[Section 40]

Resolved:

1. "That the Annual Report of the Remuneration Committee, now received, be approved."
2. "That the Report of the meeting of the Remuneration Committee, held on 18 October 2021, now received, be approved."

Members of the University Executive Board returned to the meeting.

21/77 Appointment of the President

The President recused himself from the discussion of this item and withdrew from the meeting. Mrs Owen chaired the meeting.

The Council received a paper on the appointment of the President in succession to Dr Preston.

Mrs Owen noted, with regret, that Dr Preston's term of office as President would come to an end on 31 July 2022 and that, in consequence, consideration needed to be given to the process for appointing his successor. It was proposed that the role would be advertised publicly, and current lay members of Council would be welcome to apply; in the event that public advertisement did not yield an appropriate field, consideration would be given to appointing professional consultants to assist in the process. Mrs Owen invited members who were interested in serving on the appointment panel to contact her or the University Secretary and Chief Strategy Officer. The Committee endorsed the proposed process. Members were asked to provide Mrs Owen or the University Secretary and Chief Strategy Officer with feedback on the draft role description, which had already been discussed with the President and Vice-Chancellor. It was agreed that person specification would differentiate between necessary and desirable attributes.

In response to a question from Mrs Egan, the University Secretary and Chief Strategy Officer advised that practices for appointing a President of Council (or the equivalent role) varied across the sector. The majority appointed through open competition, while a few restricted the field to the existing membership or adopted an alternative process.

21/78 Dates of further meetings of the Council in the Session 2021/22

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

Tuesday 25 January 2022 at 2.15pm
Monday 14 March 2022 at 2.15pm
Monday 4 July 2022 at 2.15pm.