

Council

24/86 A meeting of the Council was held Tuesday 19 November at 5pm and Wednesday 20 November at 9am, in Room 201 Carrington Building Whiteknights.

Present at the meeting on Tuesday 19 November:

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

Mr S. Alexander	Mrs S. Maple
Professor E. Beleska- Spasova	Mr. A. McCallum
Mrs S. Butler	Mr P. Milhofer
Mrs P. Egan	Mr P. Milner
Professor R.Frazier	Mrs S. Peck
Mr S. Gandhi	Mrs. S Plank
Professor J Gibbins	Dr C. Shaw
Mr J. Haxell	Professor K.Strohfeltd
Mr J. Jack	

In attendance:

The Chief Strategy Officer and University Secretary
The Director of Finance
Ms E Ashley, Deputy Director of Finance
Mrs E Murphy-Boyce (minute secretary)
Mr J Liu (ahead of joining the Council on 1 January 2025)

Apologies had been received from Kate Owen, Shamshad Ali and Janet Young.

24/87 President's Opening Remarks

The President:

- Welcomed Council members and reminded them that the agenda contained important items concerning the strategic activities of the University.
- Confirmed that the Council would be asked to make major decisions related to the Department of Chemistry, but that this would be discussed in detail at the meeting the following day.
- Noted that the next two hours would be dedicated to discussion about the proposed mission, vision and strategy which had been laid out in documents provided to Council prior to the meeting.

- Welcome Mr. Liu to the meeting and noted that he would be observing; he would join the Council formally in January 2025.
- Noted that the meeting would be Mrs. Egan's last as a member of the Council. The President acknowledged Mrs. Egan's significant contribution to Council over the years, first becoming a member in 2016, and serving on the Scrutiny and Finance Committee, the Student Experience Committee, the Honorary Degrees Committee and attending Senate for a number of years. Mrs. Egan also sat on the advisory committee for the Museum of English Rural Life in a personal capacity. The President thanked Mrs. Egan for being a constructive colleague and for her work and support over the years.
- Welcomed Ms. Ashley, one of the Deputy Directors of Finance, who would be stepping up to support UEB in this time of change. The President noted that Council were glad to have the benefit of Ms. Ashley's expertise now and moving forward.
- Noted that Mr. Grice, the Director of Finance would be retiring next year. A proper acknowledgement of and thanks for Mr. Grice's contribution would follow in the new year.
- Noted that a number of communications had been received in relation to the proposals to close the Department of Chemistry. The President confirmed that all communications that had been received prior to 12pm on 18 November had been uploaded into the background reading papers for Council to access. It was confirmed that any subsequent communications received after this deadline would be uploaded and available for Council members before the meeting the next morning.

24/88 Mission and Vision; Strategy

The Vice-Chancellor referred to the slide deck that had been provided to Council members prior to the meeting. The Vice-Chancellor confirmed that Council would be asked to formally approve a number of recommendations linked to the proposed mission, vision and strategy at the meeting the following day.

The Vice-Chancellor reminded Council that the University Executive Board had been asked by Council to think about the University Strategy post 2026, when the University would reach its centenary year and its current strategy would come to an end, and also to explore areas where the University could gain a competitive advantage. Following the unexpected shortfall in student numbers that had become apparent in Autumn 2024, the process to complete these tasks had been accelerated and it was now necessary to make some urgent decisions. The Vice-Chancellor explained that the ideas put forward in the presentation had been developed by the UEB following the last meeting of Council in September 2024.

The Vice-Chancellor explained that in developing the new vision and mission, the UEB had worked systematically through Porters Five Forces Model and that doing so had provided clarity on the areas that had the greatest impact on the University's competitive position, [withheld, section 43].

The Vice-Chancellor explained that evidence showed that, in order to compete against the strong brand of the Russell Group, higher tariff medium sized research intensive universities with a clear differentiation had the best competitive advantage. [Withheld, section 43].

The Vice-Chancellor set out a proposition [withheld, section 43]. This was not a new strategy, but a proposition to make the University more competitive.

The Vice-Chancellor explained the need for the University to continue to improve its position in both UK and international rankings with an aim to be in the top 100 universities within 6-10 years. He confirmed that since winning the Times 'Sustainable University of the Year' award and being named no.1 in the People and Planet rankings, the University had improved its ranking in the Times Good University rankings by 10 places. [Withheld, section 43].

In response to questions and comments from Council members the Vice-Chancellor:

- [Withheld, section 43].
- [Withheld, section 43].
- [Withheld, section 43].
- Explained that this was not a short term project, and that in the long term it was hoped that the University would be able to engage with partners in order to deliver the vision and mission. [Withheld, section 43].
- [Withheld, section 43].
- [Withheld, section 43].
- In relation to questions about whether the focus if the vision was too narrow, explained that the UEB was specifically looking for a clear differentiator rather than wider areas in which the University was strong. [Withheld, section 43].
- [Withheld, section 43].

The Vice-Chancellor resumed his presentation and set what Council would be asked to formally approve the following day, as follows:

1. Support for the refocused mission and vision (beyond the 5-year horizon)
2. That the indicative level and timeline of savings be accepted
3. That the Investment Fund be used with immediate effect
4. Removal of all restrictions on using the 3% return from the Investment Fund
5. For internal reporting purposes, separate the net expenditure on projects supported by the Investment Fund from normal operating expenditure
6. Support continued growth of the Investment Fund through managed land disposal

7. Support that NIRD make future grants for the full economic cost of research in agriculture and food to support the University's cash flow

In response to questions and challenge on this, the Vice-Chancellor:

- Clarified that UEB was asking Council to allow it to spend the 3% return available from the Investment Fund, to deliver on the proposed mission without further approval from Council. The Vice-Chancellor noted that it was vital to preserve the sustainability of the fund for future generations and agreed that Council should provide some guard rails around the permitted spending.
- Clarified that the consequence of approving the proposal put to Council would mean that the University remained in a deficit and would not return to a surplus for a further 4 years.
- Clarified that the approval of the proposal would likely involve a requirement to reduce staffing by about 10% , in order to meet required financial targets. The Vice-Chancellor further noted that the proposal was not fully formed and that should Council give the UEB the steer required to move ahead, more detailed proposals would be developed. Detailed financial information would be provided to Council as part of the March budget proposal.
- Explained the alternative option to Council if it was not minded to approve the proposal. This would involve non-strategic redundancy which was likely to impact adversely on student recruitment, rankings and reputation. The Vice-Chancellor noted that a number of UK universities were already taking this approach. The Vice-Chancellor explained that it would be clear to see whether the proposed scholarships, included as part of the proposal, had worked by August 2025. If the plan had failed, Council could at that time decide to approve further action to deal with the deficit. It would not be possible to deliver something in between these two options that had been set out. The Vice-Chancellor acknowledged that there was further modeling to do on the alternative position if Council wished to see this.

The Council was broadly supportive of the direction of travel. It thanked UEB for the hard work that had been done to present the refreshed mission and vision at such pace, and looked forward to considering the formal recommendations when it reconvened tomorrow morning.

24/89 The President drew the discussions to a close, and concluded the meeting.

24/90 The meeting resumed at 9am on Wednesday 20th November 2024.

Present:	The President	(in the Chair)
	The Vice Presidents	Mr K. Corrigan and Mrs K Owen
	The Vice-Chancellor	

The Deputy-Vice-Chancellor
The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Dr C Baylon)
The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Professor E. McCrum)
The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Professor D. Zaum)

Mr. S Ali	
Mr S. Alexander	Mrs S. Maple
Professor E. Beleska- Spasova	Mr. A. McCallum
Mrs S. Butler	Mr P. Milhofer
Professor R. Frazier	Mr P. Milner
Mr S. Gandhi	Mrs S Peck
Professor J. Gibbins	Mrs S Plank
Mr J. Haxell	Professor K Strohfeldt
Mr J Jack	

In attendance:

The Chief Strategy Officer and University Secretary
The Director of Finance
Ms E Ashley, Deputy Director of Finance
Mrs E Murphy-Boyce (minute secretary)
Mr J Liu (ahead of him joining the Council on 1 January 2025)

Apologies for absence: Penny Egan and Janet Young

24/91 President's opening remarks

The President:

- Thanked the University catering team for the hospitality at the Council dinner held on the previous evening
- Reminded Council members that they had received a clear outline of the proposed mission and vision and related savings the previous evening, with plans to go into further detail on the plans during this meeting
- Explained that Council would be asked review a bold set of considerations and make tough decisions related to the Department of Chemistry. It was clear that there were long standing issues in the department that needed addressing. The President called for all members to give their views and opinions on the proposal to ensure that the best decision was made.
- Asked Council to make any declarations of interest related to the proposals to close the Department of Chemistry. The following members declared an interest:

- Professor Richard Frazier (Head of the School of Chemistry, Food and Pharmacy)
- Professor Katja Strohfeldt (Academic in the School of Chemistry, Food and Pharmacy)
- Dr Chris Shaw (Alumnus of Department of Chemistry at Reading)
- The President noted that she had been the Chief Executive of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society for a number of years.

24/92 Mission and Vision; Strategy

The Council conducted a robust discussion on the proposals put forward by the Vice-Chancellor the previous evening, and as set out in the papers made available to the Council prior to the meeting. In relation to the revised mission and vision, the Council focused their discussions on the likely response of the institution to the proposals, how, if accepted the proposals would be operationalised, and how to ensure that the commitment [withheld, section 43] was authentic and could be demonstrated across the broad range of activities carried out at the University.

The Council accepted that the proposal represented a new way of working for the University, and was a result of the UEB being encouraged by Council to be bold in an attempt to solve the current financial issues being experienced. It endorsed the refreshed mission and vision as both providing the University with a distinctive competitive advantage, but also drawing from the University's values. Council agreed that in order to be bold, and to capitalise on [withheld, section 43] as a differentiator, it would need to approve the broad direction of travel without having the full detail. It was acknowledged that Council would want regular check-in points with the UEB to ensure oversight of the proposals as they were finalised, while also recognising that Council wished to empower UEB to move at a faster pace than had been usual, in order to meet the business pressures on the University. It was agreed that the UEB would provide a progress report to Council in January, with full financial details to be provided with the new budget in March, but that UEB should press on with implementation in the meantime.

The Council carefully considered the alternative proposal put forward by the Vice-Chancellor. [Withheld, section 43].

The Council agreed it was supportive of the direction of travel proposed, on the understanding that the UEB would provide further detail around how the proposals fit within the current strategy, the parameters of the proposals, and clarity on the financial and reserves position, in January as much as possible. The Council agreed that it preferred the proposed mission and vision to the alternative position, despite the fact that this meant a longer period in deficit. It was noted that the proposals were likely to result in a reduced staff headcount, and that the process of reaching that position would need to be carefully and sensitively managed.

The Council sought further clarity on the reserves position in relation to the Investments Fund. It was agreed that subject to putting in place some parameters around the spending in order to ringfence the funds for transformation related projects, and continued transparency around spending, the request to use the Investment Fund in line with the proposed mission and vision strategy was approved.

The Council discussed the proposal linked to the NIRD trust, which was recognised as being a critical part of managing the University's cash-flow. It was noted that if Council supported the request today, it would then have to go back to the NIRD Trust Committee for comment, before coming back to the Council in due course for approval as the Trustee. Council acknowledged that due to new members joining Council it would be useful to reshare the NIRD Objects and Protocol with members of Council to remind them of their obligations as Trustees of NIRD. Council noted that there were well established processes and methodologies in place for managing transfers of funds from NIRD to the University in accordance with the Trust Deed. The Council agreed to endorse the proposal.

Resolved:

1. "That, the revised mission and vision for the University, so submitted, be approved for a period beyond the next five years, with some amendments to wording [withheld, section 43] to be carried out by UEB, and recognising that it built upon the existing strategy
2. That, the indicative level and timeline of savings of investment, so submitted, be approved
3. That, restrictions on using the 3% return from the Investment Fund be removed, and that both OpEx and CapEx be used for funding
4. That, the Investment Fund be used with immediate effect (and without needing to come back to Council), to fund a programme to reduce cost and improve income, in line with the Mission and Vision strategy, so submitted
5. That, a format be developed for internal reporting purposes that separates the net expenditure on projects supported by the Investment Fund from normal operational expenditure, starting in the current year (2024/25) with proposals to be brought the scrutiny and finance committee in the first instance
6. That, support be provided for continued growth of the Investment Fund through managed land disposal, by the Council
7. That, subject to input from the NIRD Trust Committee and acting as Trustee of the NIRD Trust, the shortfall on a full economic cost basis of Agrifood activities be covered from NIRD to the University from the Investment Fund (£6-£8 million per annum) for the foreseeable future"

24/93 Chemistry

The Council noted the list of recommendations made by the University Executive Board as follows:

- (a) the closure of the Department of Chemistry in light of its poor performance against research benchmarks, including the last three RAE/REF exercises, and poor performance against NSS subject benchmarks over several years, with effect of 1 August 2025.

- (b) the closure of the MChem and MSc Programmes for entry in 2025/6 and teaching out of the programmes; and to move the remaining Chemistry programmes to the School of Pharmacy.
- (c) to enter into a formal restructuring process to review staffing with the aim to retain the Chemistry staff required to deliver the remaining programmes.
- (d) to cease supporting Chemistry research not aligned with the REF Unit of Assessment 3/Pharmacy.
- (e) with regard to Technical Services supporting Chemistry teaching and research, to review the requirements for support of Chemistry research and the teaching programmes that transfer to the School of Pharmacy.
- (f) with regard to the Chemistry/Pharmacy building, that a Feasibility Study should consider how staff and research infrastructure required after the closure of the Department of Chemistry can be consolidated to ensure the most efficient use of the “Research Wing”, including possible use by external tenants. .
- (g) with regard to the Chemical Analysis Facility (CAF), that a review is conducted of the platforms and equipment used by Chemistry, to seek to rationalise the platforms managed by CAF in light of the changed research focus.
- (h) that the Project Group, together with colleagues in the School. considers the appropriate new name for the School from August 2025;
- (i) that these changes are managed where appropriate through a single restructuring process.

The Council conducted a careful, robust and extensive discussion of the matters that had been brought to its attention. It took due regard of the UEB recommendations; the Senate discussion; the various messages that had been received in the run up to Council from current and past students, current and past staff, the Royal Society of Chemistry and other learned societies, industry and others; and the UEB response to the points made by Senate and in those messages.

The Council, mindful of its responsibilities in regard to academic excellence and quality of student experience, focused its discussion on those areas. It accepted the case made by UEB as to the poor performance of the Department of Chemistry, over a sustained period. It concluded that significant change had to take place in order for Chemistry to achieve academic excellence and improve the experience of students. It agreed that action had to take place to remedy all areas of poor performance as soon as possible, and that such action had to address matters of culture, resourcing, focus, right-sizing and programme offering.

The Council discussed at length the optimal mechanism for delivery of the improved performance in NSS and research. It noted the UEB recommendation that the optimal mechanism for delivery was closure of the Department of Chemistry and the move of remaining activity into the Department of Pharmacy.

Council recognised the merits of the proposal and the commitment of the University to resourcing Pharmacy sufficiently to manage what would be a major change programme. The Council also noted that one of the alternatives was to leave the Department of Chemistry as a discrete department, and restructure it in order to deliver the improvements needed. The Council understood that this was also a major change

programme. It recognised that there were potentially reputational benefits, which in turn could potentially avoid detrimental impact on student recruitment, in pursuing this latter option, since (as many of the messages received by Council demonstrated) it would be more difficult to manage the positive message about how much Chemistry the University intended to retain compared to the simple headline that the Department of Chemistry was to be closed. For that reason in particular, the Council did not at this time approve the recommendation that the Department of Chemistry be closed with the resulting changes to the constitution of the School; rather, they agreed that the University follow due process in restructuring the Department of Chemistry to deliver significantly improved performance.

The Council asked for updates on progress with this restructuring, and timely reporting on whether the restructured Department was delivering the improvements needed on a timeline to be identified by UEB. Should that delivery not happen, the Council accepted that it would need to reconsider the future of Chemistry as a discrete unit.

The Council also noted that UEB was considering a reorganisation of the current large number of Schools into fewer, in part to help create academic units of a size that can deliver more of their strategic objectives within their own control, and that the organisational structure of Chemistry may need to be revisited as part of this other piece of work.

Finally, Council found it helpful to see the complete list of recommendations which provided important context for its decision making. However, on reflection it determined that after (a), these were operational matters which could be actioned as they had already been approved by UEB and did not require Council approval in addition.

Resolved:

1. “That the University restructure the Department of Chemistry, to deliver significantly improved performance, and that this restructuring form part of a formal consultation made under the University's restructuring policy
2. That UEB provide reports on performance of the Department of Chemistry, and, should these not be satisfactory, the Council reconsider the future of Chemistry as a discrete unit
3. That recommendation (b) and recommendations (d) onwards (save for (h), which is no longer relevant) be endorsed, but not formally approved, since they were a matter for UEB rather than for Council

24/94 Report of the Senate

Council received the report of the Senate which included the Annual Report on Sexual Misconduct and Harassment.

Council noted that the report reflected the very important work being carried out by the University in this area.

Council noted that the Senate had accepted the report of the University Board for Teaching, Learning and Student Experience which provided assurance that the University remained in

compliance with the OfS Condition of Registration B3. Council were appreciative of the thorough notes of the Senate discussion on this matter, that had been provided to Council.

Council agreed to approve the Annual Report on Harassment and Sexual Misconduct.

Resolved:

1. “That, the annual report on sexual misconduct and harassment, so submitted, be approved
2. “That, Council was assured that the Senate had accepted the report of the University Board for Teaching, Learning and Student Experience which provided assurance that the University remained in compliance with the OfS Condition of Registration B3; and further noted and accepted that the report included information regarding TEF metrics and NSS data which was helpful in supporting broader compliance with Condition B”

24/95 Financial Update

The Director of Finance reminded members of Council that the detail of the 2024/25 financial position, following the unexpected shortfall in student numbers, had been provided to Council at the September 2024 meeting. At that meeting, it had been agreed by Council that final recommendations should be brought back to Council at the November meeting for approval.

The Director of Finance confirmed that in September the exact fee impact loss was not known, but it was now confirmed as an income loss of -£17.5 million, which was a better position than previously estimated.

It was confirmed that a substantial amount of time had been spent reviewing the University’s capital programme as had been requested by Council previously,. A project by project review had been undertaken in order to rationalise the capital spend, and it was thought that the £30 million currently allocated to capital spend was manageable for the next two years, and that planned capital projects could continue. It was noted that a number of compromises were having to be made, and that these were detailed in the report provided to Council. There was likely to be an impact on whether any further major projects would be able to run.

The Investment Fund liquidity reserve which was available to the University in an emergency, stood at £10 million. The Director of Finance confirmed that Council were being asked to approve the use of the fund, should such an emergency occur.

Council noted that reducing and limiting the University’s capital spend was necessary but that it did come with negative consequences. It was acknowledged that colleagues in Estates and Digital who had been consulted on the proposals did believe that they could spend more than that allocated on capital projects and that there would be negative consequences of the reduction in capital budget, while accepting that the University’s focus had to be maintaining a positive cash flow position.

Council were asked to formally approve the new budget, which had been created on the basis of the measures proposed to Council in September, and to approve the proposed reduction to the capital programme.

Resolved:

1. “That, a new budget for 2024/25 and a reduction to the capital programme for 2024-25 and 2025-26, so submitted, be approved”

Impact of the Autumn Budget and the Fee Cap Increase

The Director of Finance informed Council that he had modelled the impact of the Autumn Budget in terms of the increase in employer National Insurance contributions and the proposed raise in the Tuition Fee Cap. The modelling was based on the assumption that the cap would continue to increase with inflation (although this had not yet been confirmed by the Government). The modelling demonstrated that the University would be likely to see a net benefit by the 2029/30 academic year. It was noted that any fee increases as a result of change to the cap would not have any short term impact in terms of helping to solve cash-flow issues, and that the recently announced increase in employers national insurance contributions was unfortunate timing for the sector.

24/96 Report of the People and Remuneration Committee

Council noted that an updated Performance Management Policy had been submitted to Council with some amendments from the previous version. Council agreed that the amendments seemed reasonable and approved the updated policy.

Resolved:

1. “That, the updated Performance Management Policy, so submitted, be approved”

The President of Council informed Council that it would be asked as usual at this meeting to assure itself of the process to determine UEB and the Dean of the Business School reward and remuneration, and as such, asked members of UEB and the Dean of the Business School to leave the room while those discussions took place, which they duly did.

It was noted that the Remuneration Committee had responsibility for determining senior staff remuneration within the University. The Remuneration Committee had considered a proposal from the Vice-Chancellor to award a reward to two members of UEB who had hit their KPI targets, which had been approved by the Committee. It was noted that the membership of Remuneration Committee was solely drawn from lay members of the Council and the President of Council asked such members to provide the context for the decision. Relevant Council Members noted that a long and detailed discussion had taken place at Remuneration Committee about whether the rewards should be approved given the current financial circumstances, and the Committee had come to the consensus that the award should be approved, in line with the Vice-Chancellor’s recommendations.

Council noted that this was a sensitive topic, given the decision to suspend the pay award for University staff, but concluded that the recommendations had been made in line with all the relevant policies and the agreed principles for pay awards for UEB members. Council was supportive of the process carried out by the Remuneration Committee in this regard.

24/97 Report of the Audit Committee

It was noted that the required audit process was now complete and that the outstanding going concern item could be signed off by the External Auditors.

In relation to the annual audit report, Council agreed that it would be helpful to share relevant information with Council members quarterly, rather than annually as per current process. The President of Council agreed to take this forward.

The Director of Finance, Mr. Grice, gave a brief overview of the financial statements received by Council. He confirmed that the accounts had passed through the Audit Committee and the Scrutiny and Finance Committee. He confirmed that the accounts demonstrated evidence of cost control in the previous year, with staff costs remaining static. He confirmed that the University's balance sheet looked positive, despite the current deficit position and cash-flow concerns. It was noted that it was important now to ensure the accounts were signed off so that the University could move forwards.

Council noted that work was on-going in the University on risk strategy and that Council would like further information on this as the work developed, to help inform important financial decisions they were likely to be asked to take in the future.

Council approved the report of the Audit Committee, the financial statements, as well as the attached letters.

Resolved:

1. "That, the report of the Audit Committee and the financial statements, and the attached letters, so submitted, be approved"

24/98 Loddon Garden Village

Council noted that a recommendation would be made to them in the new year regarding the Loddon Garden Village disposal strategy once it had been considered by the Scrutiny and Finance Committee and the NIRD Trust Committee.

Council, acting as the Governing Body of the University, and Trustee of NIRD were asked to approve a spend of £4.5million pounds in order to continue the work on the planning application. It was confirmed that the NIRD Trust Committee were supportive of the draw-down in order to progress the planning application.

It was noted that:

1. the tax advice requested by Council previously in relation to disposal options, would be coming to Council in January, following the University taking professional advice.
2. there is an agreed protocol in place between NIRD and the University for governing the transfer of funds properly authorised by the Trustees .

Resolved:

1. "That, the fact a recommendation concerning disposal strategy options will be coming to Scrutiny and Finance Committee at its meeting on 6 January 2025, the NIRD Trust

Committee at its meeting on 10 January 2025 and the Council, at its meeting on 21 January 2025, is noted

2. That, acting as the governing body of the University, and the Trustee of NIRD, the recommendation to spend £4.5 million to continue work on the relevant planning application prior to receiving the recommendation relating to the disposal options, be approved”

24/99 Disposals

Hyde End Road East and West and Didcot Retained Farmland

It was noted that Council had previously supported the sale of University land as a strategic option, and that both disposals presented to Council fell within those parameters. Council members noted that further background on the disposals could be provided to members if they so requested.

Resolved:

1. “That, acting as the governing body of the University, and the Trustee of NIRD, contingent on consent to sale from BBSRC (which has been requested), and noting the comments from Scrutiny and Finance Committee and the NIRD Trust Committee, disposal of Hyde End Road East and West, is approved”

Resolved:

1. “That, noting the comments from Scrutiny and Finance Committee, disposal of Didcot Retained Farmland, is approved”

Items for Report

24/100 Report of the Vice-Chancellor

The Council noted the Report of the Vice-Chancellor which had been received by members prior to the meeting.

By way of update the Vice-Chancellor:

- reminded Council that The Director of Finance, Mr. Grice, would be retiring next year and that as a result the University was recruiting for a new Chief Financial Officer. The Vice-Chancellor agreed to provide further updates to Council on this matter
- informed Council that the University had won the award for Decarbonisation Project of the Year in the 2024 Energy Managers Association (EMA) Energy Management Awards for a scheme that allocates each area of the University a maximum emissions quota for their business travel and also monitors carbon emissions from travel for each School and Directorate to ensure every journey is carefully considered and encourage the greenest option to be used.

Resolved:

1. “That, the report of the Vice-Chancellor, so submitted, be received”

24/101 Update on Agrifood

The Council received an update on the Agriculture and Food Strategy and a report from the NIRD Trust Committee.

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation), Professor Parveen Yaqoob, provided an oral update to Council on the Agrifoods project.

Professor Yaqoob noted that a final version of the Agrifoods strategy had been provided to Council at the July 2024 meeting, and that Council had requested an update on plans before the end of the year. Professor Yaqoob highlighted the matters that were being prioritised in relation to the strategy as follows:

- External recruitment to the vacant roles from on a fractional basis as previously discussed with Council
- The design of the new research farming platform, that the University was in the fortunate position of being able to build from scratch
- Ensuring the correct structure is in place to optimise the strategy, which will involve bringing in new leadership

The Council welcomed the update and noted that they looked forward to further updates in due course.

The Council received the NIRD annual report.

It was noted that an grant of £2 million is made annually to the University from NIRD (£1 million allocated to CapEx and £1 million allocated to OpEx). The formal paperwork from the NIRD Trust Committee had omitted a request for formal approval of the recommendation to award the annual grant for academic year 2024/25. It was noted that the NIRD Trust Committee had orally made the recommendation and so Council was asked to approve the recommendation that the annual grant be made to the University as Trustee of NIRD.

Resolved:

1. “That, the Agriculture and Food Strategic Future update, and the Report from the NIRD Trust Committee so submitted, be received
2. That, acting as Trustee of NIRD, and on the recommendation of the NIRD Trust Committee, the annual grant of £2 million be made to the University from NIRD”

24/102 Report of the Student Experience Committee

The Council received the report from the Student Experience Committee.

The Council received feedback about the last meeting of the Student Experience Committee meeting, which had been an interactive session with a focus on welfare and wellbeing. It was noted that there had been a significant growth in the consumption of wellbeing services at the University and the session had involved lots of discussion and questions which had been well received by the attendees. It was noted that accommodation remained on the Student Experience Committee’s agenda as an important matter for students and the University.

Council were assured that the 'Life of a Student' work was continuing with a view bringing the project to Council in March 2025.

Resolved:

1. "That, the Report of the Student Experience Committee so submitted, be received"

24/103 Report of the Appointments Committee

Council received the Report of the Appointments Committee.

Council were informed that the University was currently recruiting for the role of Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education and Student Experience), and the role of Chief Financial Officer. It was clarified that the new Chief Financial Officer role was a direct replacement for the current Director of Finance Role.

Resolved:

1. "That, the Report of the Appointments Committee so submitted, be received"

24/104 Report of the Scrutiny and Finance Committee

The Council received the report of the Scrutiny and Finance Committee.

The Council noted that the Health and Safety report had been looked at in detail by the Scrutiny and Finance Committee and that a good discussion was had on it by members of the Committee. It was noted that the minutes of the meeting represented a clear record of the conversation and helped Council members know what challenges had already been made and responded to.

Resolved:

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

24/105 Report of the Investments and Development Committee

The Council received the report of the Investments and Development Committee

Council noted that the University has allocated money to funding the first spin-out company at the University and that this was innovative and exciting. Council were assured that good progress was being made in this area and that there was adequate oversight to ensure that investment aligned with University strategy.

Resolved:

1. "That, the Report of the Investments and Development Committee so submitted, be received"

24/106 suggested items for future Council meetings

Resolved:

2. “That, the paper setting out discussion items for future Council meetings, so submitted, be received”

Items for note

24/107 Minutes (24/67 to 24/84) of the meeting held on 26 September 2024

Two corrections were requested to minutes 24/67 to 24/84:

1. A correction to the record to reflect that Ms Sian Butler had attended Council on 26 September 2024
2. A correction to the spelling of Mr Gandhi's name.

Council noted that given the current significance of the items being discussed by Council, the minutes had been unusually fulsome in order to capture the insight into conversations and challenge provided by Council members.

24/108 Matters arising

24/109 Decisions taken by the President on behalf of the Council:

Council were informed that the following decisions had been taken by the President on the Council's behalf:

- (a) Approval of a recommendation made by the sub-group on University of Reading Malaysia, established by the Council, that the option for transforming UoRM be the one to be pursued
- (b) Approval of a requisition [withheld, section 43].

24/110 Annual freedom of speech report

Council received the annual freedom of speech report

The University Secretary, Dr Richard Messer, noted that this year a freedom of speech complaint had been referred to the University Secretary under the University's Freedom of Speech Code of Practice. This had been linked the student protests that had taken place on the Whiteknights Campus in the Summer Term.

24/111 Documents sealed and to be sealed

24/112 Any Other Business

24/113 Dates of meetings of the Council for the Session 2024/25:

Tuesday 21 January 2025 10.00am

Monday 10 March 2025, **moved to 10.00am**

Monday 30 June 2025, **moved to 10.00am**

24/114 President to lead on brief reflections on the meeting of Council that has just concluded