

Academic and Governance Services

Council

20/64 An exceptional meeting of the Council was held online on Thursday 1 October 2020 at 2.00 pm.

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	(Mr P. Inman)
The Pro-Vice-Chancellor	(Professor E.M. McCrum)
The Pro-Vice-Chancellor	(Professor D. Zaum)

Professor J. Board	Mr J. Magee
Mr K. Corrigan	Ms S. Maple
Mrs P. Egan	Mr P. Milhofer
Professor R. Frazier	Miss R. Osbourne
Professor J. Gibbins	Mr N. Richards
Professor Uma Kambhampati	Dr C. Shaw
Miss B. Karki	Mr J. Taylor

In attendance:

- The Chief Strategy Officer and University Secretary
- The Chief Financial Officer
- The Director of Quality Support and Development

Apologies were received from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Mr S.C.C. Pryce.

The President welcomed Professor R. Frazier and Professor J. Gibbins to their first

In response to a question from Mr Milhofer, the Chief Financial Officer advised that the agreement for the overdraft facility did not specify an end-date and that a favourable interest rate had been agreed.

Overdraft facility

There had been presented to the President of the Council a document containing the Key Terms as well as Terms and Conditions (together the Facility Agreement) from Barclays Bank PLC (the Bank) to the Borrower setting out the terms and conditions upon which the Bank was prepared to make available to the Borrower, a Composite Accounting System (CAS) sterling overdraft facility (the Facility).

1. 'That the borrowing of the Facility by the Borrower (subject to any limits contained in the Facility Agreement) on the terms and conditions set out in the Facility Agreement is in the interests of and for the benefit of the Borrower and is most likely to promote the success of the Borrower for the benefit of the members as a whole and that such terms and conditions be and are approved and accepted.'
2. 'That Sam Foley (CFO) and Andrew Grice (FD) are authorised to sign the Facility Agreement on behalf of the Borrower to indicate acceptance of the terms and conditions.'
3. 'That the Bank is authorised to act in all matters concerning the Facility upon instruction from the Borrower signed in accordance with the Bank's mandate for any of the accounts of the Borrower held with the Bank current from time to time.'

Bond/guarantee facility

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In response to a question from Mr Beardmore-Gray, the Vice-Chancellor acknowledged the

In considering these questions, the Phase 2 Task Force had developed proposals relating to the rationalisation of the portfolio of teaching and assessment, greater efficiencies in the use of space, the management of workloads and performance, and greater use of digital technologies in ways of working and teaching. Professor Fellowes explained that, while the proposals might appear rather dull and worthy, they addressed fundamental issues related to the University's core mission and provided a secure platform from which the University could achieve its ambitions in a challenging environment.

The President invited Professor Frazier (as the member elected by the Senate), Professor Gibbins (as the member elected by academic staff), Mr Magee (as the member elected by professional services staff), and the RUSU President to comment on the proposals.

Professor Frazier expressed his support for the principles underpinning the proposals and
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grow student numbers, which, in view of the demographic trend, should be achievable while increasing the entry tariff. He acknowledged that the presentation of the proposals was low-key and that it did not set out an ambition for a large future investment or initiative. He believed that staff did not have the capacity to engage with a large initiative at present and would have little tolerance for such a proposal; instead, staff recognised that, in order to achieve financial sustainability and fulfil its ambitions for excellence in teaching and research, the University needed to address systematically a set of serious, difficult and unglamorous issues and to deliver against the objectives set out in the new strategy.

In response to questions from other lay members, Professor Fellowes acknowledged that young people had experienced disappointment and uncertainty over the past year and that, in consequence, some might be more sceptical about the value of higher education. It was important that the University articulate clearly the quality of the student experience and the benefits of studying at Reading. Following implementation of Phase 2, the University would be able to offer more effectively a more personal approach to teaching, where there were fewer large lectures, and a stronger sense of community as School/department-based common rooms fostered staff-student interaction. Equally, the University should promote its commitment to environmental sustainability and its work on climate change.

In response to a question from Mr Taylor, Professor Fellowes confirmed that the community-based ethos adopted in developing the Phase 1 proposals would also characterise the further development of the Phase 2 proposals. The University Executive Board was committed to inclusive management and transparency, open in their communication with staff and students, and careful to focus on what could realistically be delivered and not to over-promise.

The Council supported the direction of travel set out in the proposals and their further development. The President thanked Professor Fellowes and his team for their work.

‘That the Report on Phase 2, now submitted, be received.’

20/69 Update from the Vice-Chancellor (Item 7)

The Council received an oral report from the Vice-Chancellor.

The Vice-Chancellor reported that:

- (a) There were small numbers of academic staff, concentrated in particular subject areas, who were apprehensive about teaching face-to-face. The University was managing the situation sensitively, while maintaining its commitment to provide students with face-to-face teaching where at all possible. He indicated that he might need to consult Council further on the matter in due course.
- (b) Two students had tested Covid-positive, and their cases were being managed by the University. Given the current pressures on the local public health authorities, the planned division of responsibilities between the University and the local authorities had proved not to be feasible and the University had, without delay, assumed operational responsibility for the situation. Professor Park and Professor Zaum

were leading the Major Recovery Team, while the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Mr Inman were leading the Major Incident Teams responsible for the positive cases.

(c) The University had hosted a visit by the Universities Minister, and had showcased the blended learning being delivered by a number of academics. The Minister had been impressed by this provision and, it was hoped, had understood the substantial costs involved in the development and delivery of effective blended learning.

(d) Student recruitment had fallen short of target, but remained within the range used for financial modelling under Phase 2. The University had been advised that the range used for financial modelling under Phase 2 was 7.6% to 10.5% of the 2019-2020 budget.

