



UNIVERSITY OF
LEICESTER

66th Annual Meeting of the Alumni Association

Thursday 19 September 2024

UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER ALUMNI ASSOCIATION
66th ANNUAL MEETING

Held on Thursday 19 September at 6:00pm

Held via Microsoft TEAMS

Minutes

1. Welcome by Chair of the Alumni Association Committee

The Chair, Martin Cullen, welcomed alumni to the 66th Annual Alumni Meeting, held online via Microsoft TEAMS.

The Chair introduced Steve Corbett, Director of the Development and Alumni Relations Office.

2. Welcome from Steve Corbett, Director of the Development and Alumni Relations Office (DARO).

Steve welcomed attending alumni to the meeting. He deferred to the President and Vice-Chancellor to provide broader University updates, and instead emphasizes the importance of the University's global alumni network, both for the institution and for alumni who are part of it. Steve alluded to his introductory note in the Alumni Awards Dinner brochure earlier this year, in which he spoke about the connectivity in our modern world, and mused on how we can 'cut through the noise' to focus on what is most important. All alumni, and all Leicester alumni specifically, have a uniting common experience of their time at the University; the individual lived experience of all alumni contributes to a wider narrative of the institution, and a source of pride. Steve thanked those alumni who have contributed to the University as volunteers and donors. Steve concluded by noting that the University alumni global networking is a truly lasting and meaningful connection that alumni can be part of and call upon for a lifetime.

Steve introduced President and Vice-Chancellor, Professor Nishan Canagarajah.

3. Update and Q&A from President and Vice-Chancellor Professor Nishan Canagarajah

Update on the University

Professor Canagarajah welcomed attendees of the Alumni Annual Meeting, and began sharing his own slides to update alumni with developments in the last 12 months.

Professor Canagarajah noted he had been in post for five years now as President and Vice-Chancellor, and shared a slide of some of the developments at the University each year during his tenure.

Professor Canagarajah shared that the University of Leicester had recently received the Daily Mail University of the Year 2025 and had been shortlisted for the Times Higher Education University of the Year 2024 as well. He noted that the University will be informed in November 2024 about the outcome of the latter.

In addition, Professor Canagarajah noted, in strictest confidence, that the University has also been shortlisted for

the Times and Sunday Times University of the Year. A formal announcement of this would occur at 7am the following day, Friday 20 September. This treble success is an enormous source of pride for the institution, its staff, students and wider alumni community.

Professor Canagarajah discussed some of the University's achievements in the past 12 months, such as being given Gold TEF status, receiving £86m in research awards during 2023/24 and partnering with IntoUniversity.

Q & A

The following questions were asked by alumni in attendance and were put to the Vice-Chancellor by the Chair:

Q: How do you feel as Vice-Chancellor feel about the recent awards achieved by the University?

A: Professor Canagarajah said that he felt incredibly proud. He also noted how meaningful this success was for his staff; to be recognized by an external body is a huge boost to staff morale. The challenge will come now with trying to maintain the University's level of success year on year.

Q: Will the Botanic Gardens Festival become a mainstay annual event?

A: Professor Canagarajah said that, yes, the Botanic Garden Festival would be returning in future years. It was a very successful event and drew in a large number of attendees from across our University community. He encouraged any alumni who were interested to definitely attend the event next year.

Q: You spoke about some of the research and teaching successes at the University in the last 12 months. Could you comment on the funding environment for Higher Education more broadly? What impact might diminishing resources and / or the rising cost of living have on the University's performance.

A: Professor Canagarajah said that there were significant challenges facing the University and its student community due to the rising cost of living. It is more and more commonplace for students to be working alongside their studies, so Professor Canagarajah would welcome a government increase to the Maintenance Grant offered through Student Finance England.

As Tuition Fees are not changing, the University's income is staying flat since 2017, but the costs of operation is always growing. Many Universities are facing this same issue and are having to find solutions to balance their finances. The University is currently addressing the imbalance by placing a freeze on filling vacant posts, do some minor restructuring in some areas of the University and looking to the Development and Alumni Relations Office for philanthropy as a source of funding.

Q: What do the University's recent achievements mean for alumni? What new engagement opportunities may arise from them?

A: Professor Canagarajah said that he was heartened by alumni's interest to be involved with the University. He asked of alumni present firstly to spread the word about the University's recent successes and the reasons why alumni should be proud of their alma-mater. Secondly, he asked alumni to let the University know how they would like to engage with the University, either via the AAC or DARO office. He knows that the University's alumni have a rich repository of experience and knowledge that the University could draw from; he would

welcome suggestions for ways alumni can engage and projects that University can involve itself with. Professor Canagarajah added his thanks to all alumni and supporters who have given to the University.

Q: Aside from the recent celebration of 40 years since the discovery of DNA fingerprinting at the University, are there any other landmark piece of research of which you are proud?

A: Professor Canagarajah said that celebrating the 40th anniversary of the discovery of DNA fingerprinting was indeed a proud moment. More recent innovations from the researchers at Leicester cannot really compare, as not enough time has elapsed to realise the full and long-lasting impact on the same scale as with DNA fingerprinting. Professor Canagarajah did offer the work of colleagues in medical sciences around treatments for long-COVID and for management and treatment of diabetes; he feels in years to come these will be cited as important innovations at Leicester that helped change the world for the better.

Q: What is the University doing to help students secure jobs in a difficult job market?

A: Professor Canagarajah said that the Careers Service at the University worked with students to signpost them to opportunities, giving them opportunities to engage with employers and ready themselves for applications and interviews. Careers is also embedded into the wider University curriculum, with aspirations to implement a set amount of work-related content for every student (be it campus-based career engagement, internships, workshops etc.).

Q: How is Space Park Leicester progressing?

A: Professor Canagarajah said that Space Park Leicester is doing really well. He added that Phases 1 and 2 of development were now completed, but a Phase 3 to see further expansion of Space Park Leicester could definitely be a possibility in the future.

The Chair thanked President and Vice-Chancellor Professor Nishan Canagarajah for his time, for updating the alumni present on developments at the University and for answering the questions put to him. Professor Canagarajah thanked the Chair and the wider alumni community for all they do for the University.

4. Report of the 65th Annual General Meeting, held on Thursday 14 September 2023

Attendees of the Alumni Annual Meeting were invited to approve the minutes of the last Alumni General Meeting in September 2023. **The minutes were approved.**

5. Chair's Report of the Year

The Chair provided his annual report on activities of the Alumni Association Committee during the past twelve months.

The Chair noted that the Alumni Citizen newsletter, which is produced and sent by the Development and Alumni Relations (DARO) team, has now changed to being sent monthly.

The Chair noted that several Festival of Change lectures and talks for alumni and supporters had taken place. [Recordings of these Festival of Change lectures and talks](#) can be viewed on the University's YouTube channel or accessed via the University website.

The Chair also drew attention to some recent successful in-person events such as the Alumni Awards Dinner in May and the Botanic Garden Festival in September.

Activities of the Alumni Association Committee

Alumni Association Committee (AAC) meetings continue to operate on a hybrid basis; this has allowed for the membership of the committee to reflect the global nature of the wider alumni community that it represents.

The AAC is undergoing a process of reviewing and updating its Governance policies to more closely aligned with those of the wider University.

The AAC worked closely with the Students' Union to mark the latter's centenary in 2024.

Alumni Association Centenary

The earliest forerunner to the Alumni Association was the Graduates' Association, which records show can be traced to its formation at or shortly before a dinner that took place in December 1924. As such, the AAC has decided to work with DARO on a series of events during 2025 to mark the centenary of the Alumni Association.

Key aims of the centenary celebrations will be:

- **Celebrate and recognize** the achievements of alumni over the past 100 years
- **Increase alumni engagement** with the centenary programme of events, and the University more long-term
- **Drive fundraising and volunteering from alumni**, but also enhance alumni participation in initiatives
- **Grow the alumni community** by encouraging more alumni to sign up for communications
- **Create a legacy** that will last beyond 2025

This will be achieved through meetings of a Centenary Board, who will start meeting regularly imminently. The Chair asked for alumni to look out for further updates on the centenary later this year.

Graduations

4,834 students graduated from Leicester, and thereby joined the Leicester alumni community, during 2023/24. The AAC have a presence at Graduations, attending ceremonies and assisting at the alumni engagement stand.

Alumni Awards Dinner

The Chair shared some details of Alumni Awards Dinner in May 2024; this event took place on University campus with 121 alumni in attendance, who represented a range of graduation years and geographic locations. The keynote speech came from Baroness Sue Campbell DBE (Educational Studies Diploma 1973, Educational Studies Med 1975, Honorary Doctor of Letters 2000) and the MC for the event was Sandy Warr (Mass Communication MA 1998). A silent auction took place to fundraise for a range of University causes.

You can find out more about the award winners on our website: <https://le.ac.uk/alumni/events/award-winners->

[showcase](#)

6. Accounts: Funds at the disposal of the Alumni Committee

A brief update of the funds available from the Convocation Fund and William Ruddick Fund was given. The state of these funds on 31 July 2024 (the last day of the 2023/24 academic and financial year) was given:

The Convocation Jubilee Fund	Capital Fund:	£63,466.00
	Expendable Fund:	£517.00
William Ruddick Legacy Fund	Capital Fund:	£51,342.00
	Expendable Fund:	£1,817.00

The Chair noted that three projects had been supported by the Convocation Fund in recent years:

- COVID-19 Student Vaccine Hesitancy project (2021)
- Sport and Active Life Aspiring Leadership Award Fund (2022)
- Students' Union Centenary Event (2023), which launched fundraising initiatives to help support students with costs of participation in University clubs and societies.

The Chair noted that the William Ruddick Scholarship was reintroduced in 2022/23, and that scholarships had been awarded:

- 3 scholarships awarded in 2022/23
- 2 scholarships awarded in 2023/24
- New cohort of recipients to be selected in 2024/25.

7. Elections

The Chair gave an update on current members of the Alumni Committee standing for re-election and co-opting members of the Alumni Committee standing for election as full members.

Thank you for the following members of the Committee who are standing down:

- Dan Flatt (Joint-Vice Chair)
- Liz Blood
- Jashan Johal

Re-election of full members:

- Simon Green
- Richard Lee
- Michael Aw
- Charles du Couëdic de Kerérant

Election of new full members:

- Kim Holloway (current co-opting member)
- Lukas Stahl

Election of new co-opting members:

- Jothitha Venkatarman to replace Archie Robinson as a co-opting member, as incoming SU President
- Kate Walewska
- Rebecca Broadley
- Archie Robinson

The Chair asked the alumni community to support this resolution; **there was no objection from the online chat, so this motion was carried.**

The Chair thanked attendees for joining for the Alumni Annual Meeting and their participation in the activities of the alumni community.