



UNIVERSITY OF
LEICESTER

63rd Annual Meeting of the Alumni Association

Saturday 2 October 2021



UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

63rd ANNUAL MEETING

Held on Saturday 2 October 2021

At 2:00pm

Hybrid Meeting held in the
Digital Reading Room, David Wilson Library
and via Zoom

Minutes

Present:

Martin Cullen (Chair)	Lynda Wight (LWi)
Laura Woodhouse (LWo)	Sadé Henry (SH)
Kerry Law (KL)	Lukas Stahl (LS) (Via Zoom)
Bob Fairbrother (BF) (Via Zoom)	Richard Lee (RL) (Via Zoom)
Jashan Johal (JJ) (Via Zoom)	

Secretary: Jack Castledine (minutes)

Apologies for absence were received from **Liz Blood, Simon Green, Charles du Couëdic de Kerérant, Michael Aw, Rhiannon Jenkins**

440 alumni registered for the event, with 174 engaging with the meeting (47 in-person attendees and 127 joining virtually via Zoom), therefore the quorum of 5 alumni members was securely met.

Alumni joined virtually from places including the UK, Guatemala, Trinidad & Tobago, USA, Canada, Nigeria, Ghana, Zambia, Oman, Belarus, Georgia, Croatia, Turkey, Greece, Singapore, Hong Kong, China and Japan.

The distribution of graduation years amongst alumni who attended in person was as follows:

Class Year	1950-59	1960-69	1970-79	1980-89	1990-99	2000-09	2010-19	2020-21	Not recorded
No. of Guests	3	4	3	10	2	5	8	10	2

1. Welcome by Chair of the Standing Committee of the Alumni Association

The Chair (MC) **welcomed** members to the 63rd Annual Meeting, held in the Digital Reading Room in the David Wilson Library on University Campus. He added he hoped attendees had enjoyed events at the Changemakers: Centenary Festival despite the weather, and welcomed President and Vice-Chancellor Nishan Canagarajah to deliver his Keynote Address.

2. Keynote Address and Q&A with President and Vice-Chancellor Nishan Canagarajah

President and Vice-Chancellor Nishan Canagarajah **welcomed** attendees of the first alumni hybrid meeting, both those who had attended in person and those who were joining via Zoom from around the world.

Nishan **noted** the challenges that the pandemic had presented, specifically with regards to creating physical barriers between individuals and forcing us to explore new technology as a means to maintain strong communication and interaction. He **noted** the Festival of Change programme, which had delivered ten virtual events across 8 months during 2021, reaching 2,185 alumni from 51 different countries and territories. This accomplishment marks the largest and most globally diverse selection of alumni the University has engaged with in such a short space of time. Given the success of the Festival of Change, the University alumni engagement team intend to implement virtual and hybrid events in the future.

Nishan **emphasised** the alumni community's status as the largest stakeholder at the University and the global community of over 200,000 alumni that has been established over its last 100 years. Alumni represent the University's past, present and future, and are vital to the University's success. Alumni are also Citizens of Change – the creators, discoverers and leaders of today and tomorrow. Alumni have and are currently having a positive impact on the world and will continue to do so into the University's second century.

Nishan **noted** that the University wishes to reach out to the Alumni community in its Centenary year to ask them to contribute as part of the Centenary Alumni Census. This will help inform us about our alumni community and how best to engage with them. The insights of alumni will help us to guide our prospective students contemplating a future at Leicester, and help us to steer newly graduated alumni onto their career path. Alumni also have inspiring stories to share about their roles as Citizens of Change. Nishan urged alumni to take part in the Census later this year.

Nishan **noted** that the University's strategic plan for the next decade would be released later in the year. He closed by thanking alumni for their contributions, for attending, both in person or via Zoom, and that he looked forward to seeing them again at future events.

A Q&A then commenced with the President and Vice-Chancellor, in which he responded to questions from alumni both in the room and online. Examples of the questions asked included:

Q: What support is the University offering to students who struggled with the lack of in-person teaching during the pandemic?

A: Nishan acknowledged that some students may find the blended approach of in-person and virtual lectures and other classes challenging. A recent student survey conducted in May 2021 indicated that some students are worried about their ability to engage with digital material. The University did offer the Headstart programme over the summer to level the playing field and help inform worried students about how best they can engage with virtual lectures and classes.

Q: What plans does the University have in place for alumni who wish to continue having access to the University's library and research facilities?

A: Nishan stated he would need to confirm what is offered to alumni currently, and look at what can be realistically offered to alumni. He added that while alumni may be able to access facilities, this lacks the collaboration and discussion that much of research hinges upon. It is through having conversations with other researchers that ideas can be cultivated.

Q: Why does the University not place importance on its rankings?

A: Nishan refuted this statement – on the contrary, the University places great importance on its rankings. He noted a recent success the University had made in The Guardian University Guide 2022, having climbed 47

places to be ranked 30th. Nishan noted that the University's Strategy would be published in November 2021, and by addressing our priorities in the Strategy, the University would also raise its profile and hopefully its ranking. Climbing the rankings is not the University's primary goal, but by providing high-quality teaching and research we would raise the University's profile and rank.

Q: What lessons has the University learnt from the pandemic?

A: Nishan explained he believes that one of the University's key lessons from the pandemic is that 'Necessity is the Mother of Invention'. The pandemic forced the University into being nimble and adaptive, and offer online teaching as an alternative to in-person teaching. He acknowledged, however, that online teaching is not a substitute for in-person teaching, hence the blended approach the University has adopted. The University is still grappling with the issue of online learning leading to reduced motivation to engage in some students. Nishan noted that many breakthroughs come about through casual conversations between students, colleagues etc. around the water cooler, and such interactions are lost when we join only for virtual lectures, classes and meetings. Another consideration that has arisen during the pandemic is the way that technology allows interaction over great distances, negating the need for travel. It will be a broader question for society as a whole to answer: What are the practical and environmental benefits of using technology? Is travel, particularly international travel, justified for this purpose?

Q: What can the alumni community do to help?

A: Nishan explained that firstly alumni can engage with the University – by taking an interest in our vision and mission, asking us about our work, telling us what they think and by acting as our ambassadors and advocates in wider society. Furthermore, alumni can look for ways to be more involved by volunteering their time and talent – as mentors, by offering to give a talk or sit on a panel, by submitting an alumni profile and sharing their experiences. Alumni can also lobby for the University in any spheres of influence they may have. Finally, Nishan acknowledged that some things only money can do, and so alumni could contribute financially to the University if they are able and so inclined.

3. Report of the 62nd Annual General Meeting, held on 3 October 2020

Attendees of the Alumni Annual Meeting were invited to approve the minutes of the last Alumni General Meeting in October 2020. **The minutes were approved and the approval seconded.**

4. Chair's Report of the Year

The Chair, Martin Cullen, **delivered** his report of Alumni Committee activities of the last 12 months. He **noted** the challenges alluded to by the President and Vice-Chancellor, mainly the pandemic forcing Committee members to meet virtually. Martin acknowledged it had been challenging but reassured alumni that meetings had been maintained throughout the pandemic.

Martin **noted** the successes that had arisen from the new virtual way of working; it had allowed the Alumni Committee to allow new co-opted members to join from around the world. He also noted that technology had been pivotal to the successes of the Festival of Change series of alumni events. Martin expressed his aspiration for Alumni Committee meetings to take on a hybrid format going forward.

Martin **gave** a brief outline of some of the Alumni Committees priorities to work on in the coming year. He hopes for the Alumni Committee to continue to speak on behalf of alumni to University leadership and Council. He noted that a Governance Review was being undertaken for the Alumni Committee, with a Task and Finish Group having concluded their activities in the process and a sub-group taking on the new Terms of Reference for a final review. He hoped for updates on this to be shared in early 2022.

Martin **noted** the launch of the American Friends of the University of Leicester had taken place in November 2020, and had raised \$260,000 US since January 2021 for the University. Martin noted that the Alumni Committee's own managed funds, the Convocation Fund and the William Ruddick Fund, were being reviewed. He **noted** that a gift of £5,000 had been made in support of the COVID-19 Vaccine Uptake Project, which aims to develop questionnaires and interviews to help inform recommendations on COVID-19 vaccine-delivery programmes across the UK Higher Education sector.

5. 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 and attendees asked to approve if these figures seemed accurate. **The figures were approved and this approval was seconded.**

6. Elections

Martin Cullen handed over to Vice-Chair Lynda Wight to give 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.

Current members of the Alumni Committee who were standing for re-election were:

- Elizabeth Blood
- Charles du Couëdic de Kerérant
- Dan Flatt
- Simon Green

Attendees voted in favour of re-election for all four current members of the Alumni Committee.

Current co-opted members of the Alumni Committee who were standing for election as full members of the Alumni Committee were:

- Richard Lee
- Jashan Johal
- Michael Aw

Attendees voted in favour of election of all three co-opted members to full membership.

New individuals who were standing for election as co-opted members of the Alumni Committee were:

- Rhiannon Jenkins, President of the University of Leicester Students' Union for 2021/22

Attendees voted in favour of election of Rhiannon as a co-opted member of the Alumni Committee.

Lynda **noted** that four spaces were available for co-opted members of the Alumni Committee, and that an excellent response had been received from a recent call for applications. These applications were being reviewed and co-opted members would be invited to join the next Alumni Committee meeting in December.

7. Future work of the Alumni Committee

Martin **gave** a brief update on upcoming work for the Alumni Committee. They will continue to hold meetings in a hybrid format mixing in-person and virtual interaction between members. The Committee will continue to represent the interests of alumni in matters such as University graduations and to work closely with the

Students' Union. Martin also expressed interest in creation of an alumni committee blog and/or social media platform, and allocation of a designated alumni space on campus.

Martin **noted** his involvement in the applications process for a new Director for DARO, with announcement of a successful appointment hopefully being made later this year.

Martin **asked** alumni to keep in touch with the DARO office and look out for their Alumni Census and news of alumni events in the New Year.

