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ROYAL COLLEGE OF ART

THE COUNCIL

Meeting of the Council to be held on Wednesday 25 March 2026, 3.30pm-6.30pm in Room DAR.08.001A, 8th floor, Darwin Building, Kensington Gore, London SW7 2EU

Agenda item 1. Attendance, apologies, and quorum:

1. Dame Madeleine Atkins, Independent member
2. Sir Peter Bazalgette, Independent member and Chair
3. Suzy Black, Independent member
4. Mary Boakye, Independent member
5. Arlo Brady, Independent member
6. Professor Hugh Brady, Independent member
7. Michael Creamer, Independent member
8. Professor Kerry Curtis, Staff member appointed by the Senate
9. John Gibbs, Independent member
10. Dr Tristram Hunt, Independent member
11. Professor Christoph Lindner, President & Vice-Chancellor
12. Dr Fiona Pathiraja, Independent member
13. Saba Shaukat**,** Board Fellow
14. Sudhir Singh, Independent member
15. Sacchita Sriganapathiraju, Vice-President Students' Union
16. Dr Anne Toomey, Staff member appointed by the Senate
17. Fields Wicker-Miurin, Independent member and Deputy-Chair
18. Amanda White, Chief Financial Officer

In attendance:

19. Heather Akif, Chief Operating Officer
20. Girard Bonotan, Governance Officer
21. Hannah Lambert, Community Engagement Manager (item 6)
22. Professor Ken Neil, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Academic
23. Zioge Smith, College Secretary
24. Professor Zey Suka-Bill, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Education and Student Success
25. James King, Director of Technology (item 11.1)

Apologies:

Michael Birshan, Independent member
Linjie (Leona) Chang, President, Students' Union

Quorum: Eight members where a majority of those present (in person or by virtual means) shall be Independent Members.

Agenda item 2. Declaration of interests

2.1 No new interests were declared.

Agenda item 3. Approved: Minutes of the meetings held on 26.11.25

3.1 The Council approved the minutes of the meeting held on 26 November 2025 as a true record.

Agenda item 4. Noted: Action log and matters arising

4.1 The Council noted the briefing by the Chair that the outstanding item on the EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) report for 2024–25 had been rescheduled for the July 2026 Council meeting.

Agenda item 5. Presentation: The Saturday Club

5.1 The Community Engagement Manager briefed the Council that building on its role in Wandsworth London Borough of Culture 2025-26, the College would launch an RCA Saturday Club in Autumn 2026 for local 13–16-year-olds from under-represented backgrounds. This initiative, focused on materiality and sustainability, reinforced the College's Access and Participation Plan and civic mission.

5.2 In discussion, Council members requested clarity on recruitment criteria, budgeting and safeguarding, while suggesting expansions into 18–25-year-old technical training and V&A collaborations. They also suggested using technology for global reach and defining measurable outcomes. The Community Engagement Manager confirmed that the program was currently hyper-local with a dedicated budget, utilising established feedback frameworks and dual safeguarding protocols.

5.3 The President and Vice-Chancellor affirmed support to the engagement team, emphasising a local-first approach before considering international scaling or adult learning.

5.4 Concluding, the Chair highlighted the necessity of networking and maintaining a creative pipeline to support talented youth.

Agenda item 6. Context Setting

Agenda item 6.1 Received: President & Vice-Chancellor's report

6.1.1 The Pro Vice-Chancellor, Education and Student Success, reported that the College was navigating its second round of recruitment and managed over 11,000 applications. Despite a decrease in the total application volume, the quality of candidates remained high. Addressing market concentration and applicant attrition were the most significant risks to the current cycle. To counter these, a robust communications strategy had been implemented. The College monitored geopolitical developments and student visa policies closely to ensure an agile response to government priorities.

6.1.2 The President and Vice-Chancellor highlighted the College's continued status as the global leader in its sector as reflected in RCA's number one ranking for art and design by QS, a position that served as a foundation for navigating the volatility in the higher education landscape. The institutional strategy focused on leveraging the College's specialised nature and small scale as competitive strengths. This strategic approach was supported by a broad suite of Executive Board-led projects, ranging from a programme portfolio review and a new research strategy to the expansion of global hubs, the diversification of revenue through education consultancy and executive education and a review of staff development.

Agenda item 7. Strategy and Performance

Agenda item 7.1 Discussed: Schools Configuration

7.1.1 The Dean, School of Communication and Interim Dean, School of Design provided an overview of the consultations that had been undertaken with academic colleagues on the proposed restructure of the Schools of the College. The process involved an examination of research trajectories, programme interactions and the introduction of new academic programmes. Central to these deliberations was the purpose and direction of existing departments and the necessity for research to have informed teaching practices. It was noted that while the School of Arts and Humanities (SoAH) and the School of Architecture (SoA) expressed a preference for maintaining structures that supported research collaboration, the School of Design (SoD) and the School of Communication (SoC) considered more substantive structural change. Consequently, "3-2-0" school configurations were explored to enhance student recruitment and academic accountability while preserving departmental identities and driving institutional efficiencies. It was agreed that the three-school configuration would proceed, with a focus on the integration of research feedback into the strategic outcomes.

7.1.2 In discussion, the Council raised the implications of the restructure on interdisciplinarity and the consistency of the student experience. There were questions on how equal learning opportunities would be safeguarded across the Schools reconfiguration. Dean Curtis reported that a comprehensive portfolio review was underway to ensure enhanced student choice. Furthermore, it was noted that a research network was being established to align programmes and schools more effectively.

7.1.3 Further discussions by the Council centred around benefits of the restructure for the research agenda. It was suggested that the research narrative had to be a primary driver of the school's momentum, particularly in relation to the Research Excellence Framework (REF) submission. Concerns were raised on the clarity of these benefits. It was recommended that the incoming Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research and Innovation should be fully briefed on the strategic alignment. Dean Curtis briefed the Council that SoAH intended to retain its name to maintain alignment with funding bodies. The new structure had already been piloting research collaborations in the immersive space, which utilised expertise from the schools of Design and Communication to inform the REF strategy and outcomes.

7.1.4 Concluding, the Chair advised that the incoming PVC for Research and Innovation should be briefed on the new School structure and its alignment with the REF strategy.

Agenda item 7.2 Discussed: UK Partnerships

7.2.1 The Pro Vice-Chancellor, Education and Student Success introduced a paper on strategic partnerships, emphasising that discussions on academic articulations had continued to progress. A proposal was presented to partner with Norwich University of the Arts (NUA) to explore a joint undergraduate award, with NUA serving as the host institution. This initiative aimed to enhance academic value and strategic fit while expanding the disciplinary portfolio of RCA. NUA maintained a triple TEF Gold status and shared pedagogical similarities with the College. The partnership was envisioned as a strategic way to influence the undergraduate pipeline and generate income. While quality assurance and resourcing requirements had been considered, a comprehensive business case and further due diligence were required before the proposal could be submitted to Council for formal approval.

7.2.2 In discussion, the Council members expressed broad support for the ambition of the project but raised several considerations:

a. It was suggested that for a joint award, an exit mechanism was essential. Observations were made about a variety of delivery models, ranging from an RCA-embedded programme to a joint-delivery model using the College's curriculum.

b. Questions were raised about the primary driver of the partnership – specifically whether it was intended for financial surplus or purely as a student pipeline. It was noted that domestic undergraduate programmes were not always financially lucrative. Concerns were also raised about potential brand dilution and the necessity of maintaining control over the curriculum.

c. Council members highlighted recent caution raised by the Office for Students (OfS) on such partnerships. Concerns were expressed on the proposed scale of 2,000 students per annum by the third year, which could potentially dominate the College's existing size.

d. The necessity of an exit clause and strategy were emphasised. It was recommended that external legal advice should be sought on OfS implications and contractual obligations to students if there was a break in the agreement.

e. Inquiries were made on whether qualitative market research had been conducted to gauge student interest in such a joint award.

7.2.3 The President and Vice-Chancellor responded that the partnership would provide the flexibility to remain impactful and relevant, creating a foundational relationship that opened doors to access across the UK and Ireland. The collaboration would assist the College in meeting its Access and Participation Plan and noted that it could learn from NUA's expertise in undergraduate education and TEF Gold standards.

7.2.4 The Pro Vice-Chancellor, Education and Student Success further informed the Council that NUA was a partner that successfully reached under-represented groups in England. It was confirmed that the feedback on legal advice, branding concerns and international student pipelines would be taken into account by the forthcoming business case.

7.2.5 The Chair noted the extensive feedback provided on risks and opportunities that should be considered, including financial modelling, refined student numbers and branding protections.

7.2.6 Concluding, the Council supported the proposed development of a business case.

Actions:

- To develop a business case on the proposed NUA partnership (PVC Education and Student Success/immediate).
- To present a paper on progression agreements for international students (PVC Academic/July 2026).

Agenda item 7.3 Discussed: Global Engagement Update

7.3.1 The Pro Vice-Chancellor, Academic showed videos of the recent RCA visit to Shanghai for the launching for the RCA Shanghai Centre, which included alumni events, research discussions and an executive education programme. An articulation agreement with Donghua University was expected to be finalised in due course, strengthening the recruitment pipeline. In addition, exploratory talks for international hubs in Dubai and Delhi were underway, though no fixed commitments had yet been made. Global education hubs would support the implementation of progression and articulation agreements to enhance recruitment. The Council would be kept apprised of these discussions as they developed.

7. 3.2 The Chair expressed appreciation for the update on global engagement.

7. 3.3 The Council noted the report.

Agenda item 7.4 Noted: Annual Research Integrity Statement 2024-25

7.4.1 The Pro Vice-Chancellor, Academic presented the Annual Research Integrity Statement 2024-25 as set out before the Council.

7.4.2 A Council member raised a concern on the absence of formal research misconduct investigations in the statement, noting that it appeared inconsistent with broader trends across the HE sector. It was asked whether the College was providing a sufficient enabling environment for early-career researchers and postdocs to express doubts about ethical research practices. It was requested that historical data and the prevalence of informal complaints should be reported at the next Council meeting.

7.4.3 In response, the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Academic confirmed that robust research ethics training was currently in place, and noted the need to review the extent to which the effectiveness of these programmes could be reported back to the Council.

7.4.4 The President and Vice-Chancellor advised that the College's relatively small scale often resulted in a low volume of reportable incidents. While no research ethics violations had been recorded, the College had observed an increase in grievances in other operational areas. This trend could be interpreted as an indicator of a healthy institutional culture where colleagues felt empowered to raise concerns.

7.4.5 A Council member raised the emerging implications of generative artificial intelligence in research and image creation, which the Chair confirmed was a component of the College's ongoing AI policy considerations.

7.4.6 The Chair acknowledged the necessity of a multi-year view on institutional research conduct. It was requested that a retrospective report, highlighting trends over time, would be provided to the Council.

7.4.7 The Council approved the Annual Research Integrity Statement 2024-25.

Action:

- To prepare a 4-5-year retrospective report on research misconduct cases (Pro Vice-Chancellor, Academic/July 2026).

Agenda item 8. Finance & Planning

Agenda item 8.1 Received: Financial update

8.1.1 The Chief Financial Officer presented an update on the College's financial forecast as set out before the Council. RCA was currently positioned slightly below its target operating margin. Several external risks were identified, specifically the geopolitical instability in the Middle East which threatened to delay consultancy and Executive Education programmes in Saudi Arabia and Qatar from June to October. Additional budgetary pressures included rising staff pay costs. On the other hand, the Council noted a Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) capital grant, a one-off income that was on track to be utilised by the 31 March deadline. This would support the year-end operating margin of the College.

8.1.2 Reporting further, the Chief Financial Officer advised that efficiency savings were being actively sought through the new school configurations and revisions to the technical services model. Significant progress was reported on cashable savings within professional services, with substantial estates-related savings projected to impact the operating cost base from summer 2027, an update on which would be presented at the July 2026 Council meeting.

8.1.3 In response to enquiries from Council members about the impact of Middle Eastern tensions, it was clarified that while the Riyadh University of Arts (RUA) contract could largely proceed via online delivery, in-person custom education for Qatar Museums would need to be paused. Furthermore, the Council deliberated on the trajectory of research and fundraising income. The Chief Financial Officer noted that while research grant applications had been submitted this financial year, the appointment of the incoming Pro Vice-Chancellor, Research and Innovation in July 2026 was expected to refine the research strategy. Regarding fundraising, the Council was informed that the Advancement and Alumni team were in the final testing phases of a new campaign.

8.1.4 The Chair commended the EB for their fiscal discipline and successful identification of savings during a period of significant economic challenge.

8.1.5 The Council noted the financial update.

Agenda item 9. Strategic Risk Register

Agenda item 9.1 Discussed: **Strategic Risk Register**

9.1.1 The Chair requested updates on any material changes to the Strategic Risk Register (SRR). The Chief Operating Officer advised that two primary areas of institutional risks had seen significant movement:

a. Staff Health and Wellbeing risk had been elevated due to the scale of ongoing institutional transformation. It was noted that the volume of concurrent projects had placed considerable pressure on staff workloads, morale and overall wellbeing, with certain programmes contributing to uncertainty regarding job security. In mitigation, a Change and Delivery Partner had been appointed to strengthen engagement and provide structured support throughout RCA's transformation projects.

b. Student Recruitment remained a critical institutional risk. This area was under active management by the Admissions and Enrolment Delivery and Enhancement Group (AEDEG). This group, which reported directly to the EB, was tasked with providing regular updates to the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) on process improvements and systems development.

9.1.2 The Chair of the ARC confirmed that the committee had conducted a detailed review of the SRR during its meeting on 26 February, including a deep dive into the data and systems supporting student recruitment.

9.1.3 The Council noted the updates on the Strategic Risk Register.

Agenda item 10. Digital & Estates

Agenda item 10.1 Discussed: Cyber Security deep dive

10.1.1 The Director of Technology reported on the College's cyber security landscape, noting that 91% of higher education institutions had reported incidents within the last year. Ransomware attacks remained a critical threat, with potential recovery costs reaching £3 million and causing months of operational disruption. It was reported that the College currently maintained a Level 3 (Defined) maturity posture, supported by formal governance and a renewed Cyber Essentials certification. While technical controls and threat intelligence were rated highly, the Director of Technology identified staff awareness, sector benchmarking and enhanced monitoring as areas for development as the College aimed for Level 4 maturity.

10.1.2 In discussion, Council members inquired about the College's specific vulnerability and the trajectory of recent threats. The Director of Technology briefed the Council that attack

volumes had fluctuated significantly, reaching a peak of 40,000 in a single month, with an increasing prevalence of AI-generated and sophisticated social engineering attempts.

10.1.3 There was an extensive discussion on institutional preparedness for cyber-attacks and the necessity of simulation exercises. The following were the key discussions:

a. Simulation and recovery: Council members emphasised the importance of executive-level exercises for major system failures resulting from cyber-attacks. It was noted that while National Cyber Security Centre protocols were practiced fortnightly, the EB had not yet been integrated into these simulations. The Chair recommended the appointment of external specialists to facilitate an EB-level crisis exercise within the year.

b. Training and compliance: Concerns were raised regarding the current two-year training cycle for staff, suggesting that continuous cyber literacy campaigns and an 80% completion rate of cybersecurity training should be the chief objective given the evolving nature of threats.

c. Content filtering and academic freedom: The Director of Technology highlighted a difference of opinion with an external audit recommendation regarding categorical web filtering. While malicious sites were blocked and security posture had been improved, it had to be balanced with the research and academic interests of the College, a position shared by many in the sector.

d. Supply chain and policy: Members emphasised the need for a clear ransomware policy and improved business resilience across the supply chain, referencing emerging legislative standards and the resource-intensive nature of post-hack administrative recovery.

10.1.4 The Chair concluded that while significant progress had been made under current leadership, the frequency of training and the maturity of the executive response remained key priorities.

10.1.5 The Council noted the report and broadly supported the suggestions on enhancing sector benchmarking, strengthening EB preparedness to respond to cyber-attacks and staff training on cybersecurity.

Action:

- To provide an update on the proposed cyber-attack simulation exercise involving the Executive Board (Director of Technology/July 2026).

Agenda item 11. Governance & Policy

Agenda item 11.1 Discussed and approved: Proposed changes to the College's Ordinances

11.1.1 The College Secretary briefed the Council on the proposed amendments to the College's Ordinances, noting that while the Council held the authority to approve these internal regulations, any subsequent changes to the Charter would require formal approval from the Privy Council. The Nominations and Governance Committee had previously reviewed and approved the proposed revisions. A further update on the timeline for the Privy Council's review of the Charter would be provided to the Council in due course.

11.1.2 The President and Vice-Chancellor clarified that the immediate objective was to refine specific operational elements within the College's current control. It was noted that the revised Ordinances were drafted to ensure they did not contradict the existing Charter, allowing the College to implement the changes without delay.

11.1.3 The Council approved the proposed changes to the College's Ordinances and noted that proposed changes to the Charter would be reported back to the Council.

Agenda 11.2 Discussed and approved: The recommendations of the Honours Committee for Honorary Doctorates to be awarded at Convocation in 2026

11.3.1 The Council approved the recommendations of the Honours Committee for Honorary Doctorates to be awarded at Convocation in 2026.

Agenda item 12. Received: Minutes from Council Committees

12.1.1 The Council received the draft minutes of the Audit & Risk Committee meeting on 26 February 2026 and Planning & Resources Committee meeting on 11 February 2026.

12.1.2 The Council noted that the minutes of the Senate meeting on 25 February 2026 would be shared at the July 2026 Council meeting.

Agenda item 13. Noted: Council Forward Agendas

13.1.1 A Council member asked for an update on the Research Excellence Framework (REF) preparations, noting that there were significant institutional expectations surrounding the arrival of the new Pro Vice-Chancellor, Research and Innovation. An initial report upon the new appointee's commencement was requested.

13.1.2 The President and Vice-Chancellor noted that the assurance role of the Council was being balanced with ongoing academic delivery. An Interim Pro Vice-Chancellor, Research and Innovation had been appointed to ensure that institutional momentum was maintained and that no research activities had been paused. REF preparations were continuing as planned and that academic staff had submitted a high volume of research grant applications during the transition period.

13.1.3 There were discussions on the long-term strategic direction of research. The President and Vice-Chancellor outlined a transitional phase where a new five-year research strategy was being developed to empower research within specific centres and schools. These cross-college research institutions were envisioned to address complex disciplinary and societal issues, in alignment with the Strategic Plan.

13.1.4 A Council member suggested that fundraising objectives should be integrated into the research strategy, noting high levels of donor interest in research-led impact. The President and Vice-Chancellor highlighted making research more attractive to donors would be a component of the upcoming research strategy.

13.1.5 The Council noted the forward agendas and the proposed addition of items on the REF preparations.

Action

- To provide an update on the REF preparations (PVC, Research and Innovation/July 2026).

Agenda item 14. Any other business

14.1.1 The Chair invited the RCA SU representative to share updates about the activities of the SU.

14.1.2 The Council noted the update from the Student Union Vice-President on student engagement activities. The elections for the next cohort of Sabbatical Officers were currently underway, with high levels of participation. The SU held several successful community-building initiatives recently, including the Spring Fete and dedicated

celebrations for Chinese New Year and Eid. It was noted that these events were well received by the students.

14.1.3 The Chair thanked the Board Fellow, whose term was ending on 31 March 2026, for her support to the Council.

Agenda item 15. **Next meeting:** 8 July 2026, 3.30pm-6.30pm

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