



Buckinghamshire New University

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Missenden Council

Minutes

date: **08 February 2011**
time: **4.00 pm**
location: **Carrington Room, Missenden Abbey**

Present:

Roy Darby (Chair)	Co-opted Council member
Anthony Bellekom	Independent Council member
Mitch Brown	Independent Council member
Ruth Farwell	Ex officio member and Vice Chancellor
Stephen Fox	Elected by Senate
Tom Foy	President, Students' Union
David Griffiths	Independent Council member
Ian Hillan	Independent Council member
Sukhie Mattu	Elected professional service employee member
Pauline Odulinski	Co-opted Council member
Simon Opie	Independent Council member
Crystal Oldman	Elected academic staff member
Keith Ryan	Independent Council member
Terri Teasdale	Independent Council member
Brian Tranter (Deputy Chair)	Independent Council member

Officers:

Ellie Smith	Clerk to the Council
Vanessa Pilon	Registrar (Governance)

In attendance:

Derek Godfrey	Deputy Vice Chancellor
John Cooper	Director of Finance
Chris Kemp	Pro Vice Chancellor, Faculty of Design, Media & Management
Trevor Nicholls	Pro Vice Chancellor, Campus & Facilities
Mal Edgson	General Manager, Students' Union
Matthew Kitching	Students' Union
Tristan Tipping	Students' Union

Apologies:

Antonia Byatt	Independent Council member
Lori Flynn	Independent Council member
David Sines	Pro Vice Chancellor, Faculty of Society & Health

676 Chairman's Welcome

676.1 The Chair welcomed one new Senate elected member of Council, Stephen Fox to his first meeting and invited him to introduce himself.

Mr Fox advised that he had come to the position of Head of School for Social Sciences, Primary Care and Education last year with a background in community and criminal justice.

677 Declaration of potential conflicts of interest

677.1 No conflicts of interest were declared or identified.

678 Review of the Strategic Plan (2010-2015)

678.1 The Vice Chancellor introduced this by advising that she and the senior management team had looked very carefully at the relatively new Strategic Plan and they were of the view that the changes to government legislation and funding cuts in higher education did not materially affect the current plan. She commented in detail on the paper circulated which drew attention to the parts of the Strategic Plan which might be affected. On the whole the areas which would be affected were still relevant with one or two requiring monitoring. It was stressed that the plan will continue to take the University to where it wants to be in 2015 which is based on the mission and vision of the University as well as the priorities as set out in the Student Experience Strategy. Council was asked to consider the information and whether they agreed that the current plan was still appropriate.

A number of questions were asked as follows:

678.2 There was no specific reference to quality of lecturing and the outcome of the student learning experience which would inform both the student experience and the reputation of the University.

Whilst there is no specific reference to "Quality" this is underpinned by the Audit and Reviews undertaken externally, eg the Institutional Audit and HEFCE Interim Review as well as sections in the plan which refer to "The Student Voice", enhancing customer service and support arrangements, understanding the Physical Environment as well as the People Strategy which details the understanding of what is a good employee for both academic and professional services.

678.3 It was noted that the proposed changes to multidisciplinary working would not be given such a high priority as previously anticipated.

Increased multidisciplinary working had been included in the plan to help broaden the student curriculum, increase the existing portfolio and increase students working together. Within the context of other changes imposed externally it is now thought that this should have a much lower priority compared with improving the student experience and the University reputation in areas of quality, employability and enhancements in the service delivery, for example, a reduction in cancelled teaching sessions. This would not mean excluding multidisciplinary but rather delaying the proposals to a more relevant time. Our increased applicant numbers show that the provision we already have is attractive to students. Emphasis should remain on achieving students' expectations.

678.4 An explanation of the proposed review of part time CPD/short courses was requested.

It is hoped that an increase in recruitment will be experienced in this area but the numbers being predicted are still conservatively based. However a review around how such part time study is offered is being undertaken to determine whether a part time course or module level delivery which accumulates to a qualification over a period of time is better in terms of recruitment.

678.5 How do we improve our reputation in relation to Employability?

The means by which universities are measured do not enhance our reputation because many of our students are entrepreneurial and move into being self employed. This does not count in the current employability measures used to produce the nationally published statistics. The University is developing measures to use which will increase our reputation in this area,

particularly for use in the Key Information Set data which will have to be published in the future, as well as lobbying through GuildHE to change the measures currently used. In addition alumni students have suggested that entrepreneurial skills should be embedded in Art and Design as well as Furniture courses so that students leave university with all the skills necessary to assist them in being self-employed. This is currently being developed both for existing students and those graduates who have completed and wish to add to their skills.

678.6 Will the recruitment of full time undergraduate numbers remain the same in 2012-13

In general it is thought that this will not be the case. The prediction is that there will be a drop in enrolments that year as a result of the increased fees. However it is hoped that the increase in part time recruitment might offset this to some extent. The reality is that no one knows what the full effect will be of this level of increase in student fees.

678.7 The monitoring of the Strategic Plan would be considered again on an annual basis through the Corporate Planning Statement which is effectively the annual operating plan. However it was thought that any changes agreed in this way would only be of a minor nature.

678.8 Council **agreed** that, with the monitoring suggested, the existing Strategic Plan 2010-15 was fit for purpose.

679 Discussions of Fees Strategy

679.1 SMT Proposals for fees based on market segmentation

Four broad markets were considered in the analysis and fee level proposals made for each market. The markets included full time undergraduate provision, professional qualifications as well as work-based, postgraduate and CPD/academic progression. The fee level proposals could be the same for all or include differential fees for different markets across both full time undergraduate and other provision. Other markets not included in the analysis were international and partner franchise.

Whatever the fee strategy agreed for 2012-13 it should be clear and transparent to applicants. The requirements to charge above the level of the basic fee are not known as the OFFA recommendations are not yet published. The modelling undertaken by the Department for Business, Innovations and Skills for loans for 2012-13 has used an average figure of £7,500 per student and with the overall number of full time students the same as now but with a dip in 2012.

A number of questions were asked and comments made.

679.2 Scholarship/Bursary Strategy – Access agreement

The OFFA requirements were not yet published, but a number of known factors were noted. These included:

- If you charge more than £6,000 you have to have a fair access agreement and spend some of the additional money on disadvantaged students
- A universal bursary will not be allowed
- Part time students can now take out fee loans and must be included in any access agreement – it is not known whether they will be included in the future number cap
- Students who do not take out a loan may not be included in the number cap
- The level of support has to reflect the amount of the higher level fees charged
- It is not known whether it will be based on a menu of things to do or in addition to what we already do
- Some of the access support we provide now is undertaken using external funding which will not be available from summer 2011

679.3 The Big Deal

The Students' Union tabled for information documents given to students which included the latest edition of the Students' Union Newspaper, the Student Involvement Guide, the Advice Centre Guide and made a presentation about the Big Deal and future proposals. The benefits of the Big Deal included:

- A rich portfolio of extracurricular opportunities and activities providing fun and recreation, personal development and life enriching skills

- Increased student engagement with the University and each other, broadening social boundaries and building a stronger community
- New and transferrable skills
- Institutional pride
- Students empowered to influence their education through an increased, robust and comprehensive network of student representation

The Big Deal at Bucks is still unique in higher education. It attracts students. They ask about this at open days and when they arrive. This contributes to the student experience throughout their time here and enhances their confidence and their employability as graduates. The Students' Union not only proposed that the Big Deal continues but that funding is increased to improve what is offered which might include, an open and accessible campus, support for mature students with childcare, employability and a louder voice, amongst others.

A number of questions were asked around additional costs, what other universities were doing and that this would have to be built in to the new fee structure.

679.4 Five Year Financial Forecasts 2011-2015

As a result of the changes to funding during the plan derived from the changes to fees a number of changes had to be made to the forecast and these were detailed in the drafts provided as follows:

- This has been re written as a bottom line forecast and includes a dramatic fall in grant income as well as a significant increase in fee income but to different timescales
- It is anticipated that there will be a 20% reduction in full time undergraduate number enrolment for 2012 because of the fees increase
- Part time fee income has not been increased pro rata to full-time increases in this timescale
- Slightly higher payroll costs for support employees and no further reduction in employee numbers
- A pay award is assumed in 2011/12 and 2012/13 rather than a pay freeze.
- It reflects a return by the end of the forecast, not the sustainability that had been planned previously as indicated by a TRAC break even in 2015
- The overall student FTE's will grow year on year and will take up some of the forecast full time undergraduate number reductions in 2012
- This is based on a full time undergraduate fee of £6,000 from 2012

A number of questions were asked around increased staff costs, pay freeze and the aim to provide an operating surplus in the future. Concerns were expressed that the operating surplus at the end of the forecast had been substantially changed since the July version of the Strategic Plan. Opinions were divided and some members thought that a middle ground should be targeted for the end of the forecast to ensure that there was some growth whilst retaining developmental potential as well as quality and the continuation of building the Bucks Brand.

679.5 Plenary Discussion on fees package

Five questions were posed for each group to consider and feed back

- a. Do you favour differentiated fees, or a flat rate for all undergraduate full time courses? Why?

Three groups supported differential fees but it was thought that each level of fee charged should specifically offer something unique related to what the market might bear and the cost to the University in offering the course. The fee could be set at a lower level for some courses to encourage the student (customer) to study particular courses which we wished to fill or felt there could be a good market in the future. Whatever fees are charged the costs should be clear and transparent. One group felt that there was no need to differentiate and that the fee should be above basic stressing the uniqueness of the University

- b. If you favour a flat fee do you prefer a high, medium or basic fee in the range £6-9k? If differentiated, what levels of fees would you use?

Two tables felt that the fee should be a flat one, probably above base level even if there were courses offered at a lower fee elsewhere

- c. Do you consider that it might be appropriate to offer some new provision, delivered through partners, to enable different lower fees to be charged without impacting on the Bucks 'brand'?

All supported using partners to offer courses with lower fees. A number of comments were made to this including, the affect on the Bucks Brand, competition, quality assurance as well as offering different models which were shorter, cheaper and more efficient. It was thought that early marketing of such provision might assist in higher levels of recruitment.

- d. What financial commitment might we provide to deliver our Access Agreement? What might it comprise?

A variety of comments were made including insufficient information to have an informed view, the support could be a percentage of the difference between the upper and lower fees charged and it might be more useful to target support through the cost of living loan rather than the fees loan.

- e. Should the Big Deal continue? Are there other aspects, which are important to the Bucks 'brand' which might be costed into our fees strategy which are not well resourced at present?

Support was expressed for the Big Deal and it should be maintained as part of the University experience. However it was thought that it should be reviewed and very careful consideration be given to some of the suggested additions some of which might be useful. It was generally thought that the faculty part of the Big Deal did not consistently add to the student experience.

Decisions on fee structure and access agreements must be made at the March Council meeting. Additional comments were invited to inform this decision in advance of the meeting.

680 Partnership with Aylesbury College

- 680.1 Proposals were put forward to develop a closer working relationship between the two institutions with a view to selecting a small number of governance models to consider at the March meeting of Council with a final proposal and decision being taken in July 2011.

The drivers towards this closer partnership included a dovetailed mission and ethos, managing the external environment, institutional stability as well as efficiency and productivity. Discussions had been held with relevant local organisations who had received the proposals positively.

The draft partnership mission was "To provide an integrated and flexible high value HE/FE vocational solution to learners and employers in order to produce a competent and productive workforce for Buckinghamshire".

Work to develop an infrastructure and deliver the partnership may be jointly or as separate organisations but it would be important that each organisation retained their own brand.

There was support from Council for the work undertaken.

(Action: Vice Chancellor)

681 Chalfont

- 681.1 The information previously circulated was considered together with the up to date position which was that Cromer Homes were not currently in a position to meet the earlier deadline.

It was **agreed** that the current deadline be extended to the end of March 2011 with a negotiated increase in price to reflect the additional maintenance costs borne by the University. If this was not met the negotiations would revert to the original June deadline.

(Action: Director of Finance)

682 Date of next meeting

682.1 The next meeting of Council is scheduled to take place on Monday 21 March 2011, commencing at 4.00pm in Room 3.07, at the **Uxbridge Campus**.

NB: It is anticipated that this will be an extensive meeting in order to debate and agree fees for 2012-13 and refreshments will be served during the meeting.

The meeting started at 4.00pm and finished at 6.25 pm.

Signed: _____ Date: _____
(Chair of Council)

Prepared by Registrar (Governance) – 9 February 2011
Checked by Clerk to the Council – 14 February 2011
Confirmed by the Chair – 21 February 2011
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