



Buckinghamshire New University

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with	

Joint Council/Senate Meeting

Minutes

date: **22 November 2010**
time: **4.00 pm**
location: **Board Room, High Wycombe**

676 Declaration of potential conflicts of interest

676.1 No conflicts of interest were declared or identified.

677 Minutes of the joint meeting held on 23 November 2009

677.1 It was noted that the minutes of the last meeting were confirmed by Council on 22 March 2010.

678 The Browne Report and Comprehensive Spending Review

678.1 Overview Presentation and Vice Chancellor's Report

The changes to the funding mechanisms for higher education as a result of the above announcements were shown as follows:

- No up-front payment of tuition fees by students and instead a graduate contribution
- No publicly funded university will be able to charge more than a particular amount to home and EU students for its undergraduate courses. The 'basic threshold' is £6,000 and in 'exceptional' circumstances an 'absolute limit' of £9,000.
- 'Tougher regime' of sanctions relating to widening participation and fair access for those charging over £6,000.
- Graduates start paying back when their income reaches £21,000 with repayment of 9% of income above this threshold, with all outstanding payments written off after 30 years.
- Tapered real rate of interest for graduates earning between £21,000 and £41,000 (up to inflation plus 3%) and over £41,000 graduates make a real contribution.
- Non-repayable grants of £3,250 for families with incomes up to £25,000 and partial grants up to £42,000. Increases in maintenance loans for families with incomes between £42,000 and £60,000.
- Part-time students studying at least a third of an FTE will be entitled to a loan for tuition.

These would apply to new entrants from 2012-13 and would be phased in over 3 years. The way student numbers will be allocated, whether they are controlled and whether students who do not take out loans will be included in the control, are not known.

A summary of the Strategic Plan 2010-2015 was presented:

- Applied and relevant; employability
- Growth in applied research/scholarship
- Expansion of postgraduate, part-time and work based courses
- Part-time in areas previously only full-time
- Postgraduate: niche and relevant, linked to strengths
- Expansion of short courses and CPD
- Deliver HEFCE contract through UG
- Summary of projected numbers within different modes

A number of headlines about the new system circulating around the sector include:

- We should have confidence in the future as we are in a good position linked to our local communities
- A 'big experiment' (BIS official) – Nowhere else in the world is there such a large switch from public to private payment for higher education
- The parents of middle class young people will pay for their sons' and daughters education – What about our students?
- There may well be more students in the system in future but fewer full time equivalents
- A smart graduate would set up their own business and pay themselves less than £21,000pa

Other institutions reactions to the proposed changes included the range of fees which will be charged in relation to subject areas and types of university, potential or not for clearing in the future, quality assurance and business models, how much students will be prepared to pay, growth in apprenticeships as well as developing a market by assisting with the development of private sector employment.

The profile of Bucks students showed 61% are over 21 on entry and 34% are over 25. In addition a third of our students declare an ethnicity other than white British and 16% come from two local District Council areas. Some of these students may be deterred by increased fees. To maintain the grant and fee income the University currently receives would mean setting a fee at a little over £6,000 per student on average.

At the last Council meeting an action plan was proposed to identify what information would be required to make informed choices in relation to these changes. These included:

- Collection of evidence to re-affirm, or otherwise, the strategic intent for the University as set out in the Strategic Plan
- Review of the academic portfolio from the perspective of cost and pricing in the future and to what extent certain courses could only ever be low price while others might command a premium price
- Investigate data on the current student profile in terms of age and home location.
- Find out what feeder schools and colleges think about higher fees and thus evaluate impact on demand in the future
- Consider the morale of employees and how to avoid fragmentation if some subject areas can command premium prices
- Continuing to explore the growth agenda including vocational and higher level apprenticeships

The detail of the changes proposed by Government will not emerge until the publication of the White Paper, due for publication later 'in the winter'. These changes can, potentially, affect the new University Strategic Plan 2010-15. This meeting is one of the ways that the SMT are consulting stakeholders as to whether the new plan is still relevant and whether there needs to be minor or substantial changes to address changes in the way HE is funded.

679 Small Group discussions and feedback

A number of questions were asked and each group looked at 2 questions and fed back their most important answer during the plenary session.

679.1 Question 1 - The challenge is differentiation. Do we need radical new ideas e.g. different delivery models? But how do we make sure that we keep the market that we currently have?

The suggestions included maintaining the stability of the current portfolio by marketing what we do best and differentiating what we offer that is different to other universities through a unique selling point. In addition radical new ideas should be developed to attract students, through well designed and managed pilot schemes.

679.2 Question 2 - What might our policy on bursaries be? Should we focus more on scholarships for those really in need, or use our bursary policy as an alternative means to charging lower fees?

It was thought that the use of scholarships was a better way of attracting students rather than a bursary but it should be offered both to encourage wider participation and to stimulate demand from the top end of the academic spectrum as well as an industry focus to improve the quality of the student experience.

679.3 Question 3 - Given that students will be contributing a much greater percentage of our income, how much should the student voice determine resource allocation in the future?

It was thought that an increasing contribution by students would be expected and this should also be extended to employers/industry. It should be more along the lines of transparency, frequency and influence rather than decision making but could be used in our brand development.

679.4 Question 4 - Should we assume that we can cover all of the reduction in teaching costs by substituting higher fees rather than cutting costs? This would lead to an improved financial forecast. Are we potentially becoming too lean?

It was suggested that more flexible thinking and smarter working through changes to current practice would be more successful. These might include two year degrees, three year honours and masters degrees as well as more flexible contracts suiting individual modes of study.

679.5 Question 5 - Is this an opportunity to charge more and do things better than at present i.e. give students a better experience? What do students value? Broadening out from that what is the purpose of Bucks, and what do people expect of us?

It is considered that Bucks is still trying to be all things to all students. Specialise more for example in Leisure, Children and Health and charge more for specific courses where it is thought the market will bear it.

679.6 Question 6 - Students will be paying more and expecting more in future even if universities have only the same amount of resources as now. How can we improve our offer to justify higher fees?

Identify the student market including the social needs of the students and provide top class facilities based on their needs both socially and academically. These could include improving the physical environment in the recording studios and library as well as outside sports facilities, what we offer digitally and what new students may want which could be different from now.

679.7 Question 7 - To what extent will prospective students be driven by perceived value for money? If we charge a lower fee than most, will we be perceived to be 'bargain basement'? Should we offer some courses at lower fees through a subsidiary company or through a partner rather than damage our brand?

Greater transparency should be shown in relation to the student fees and how they are spent as well as involving students in identifying how they may be spent better.

679.8 Question 8 - Are differential fees by subject too complex a message for the market? Does it fragment the overall offering? Would it effectively lead to the faculties, schools or even departments being the equivalent of subsidiary companies, and would this encourage or deter inter-disciplinary work?

There is a need for a differential fee structure with smart decisions made on the level of fee applied to which course. Considerations might be competition, unique selling points or alternative opportunities.

679.9 Question 9 - Should the next five years be about consolidation or growth? How much surplus should we aim to generate and what will it be used for?

There will be a need to consolidate in some areas, grow in others as well as creating a surplus to improve the student experience.

680 Plenary questions and comments to Chair, Vice Chancellor and Senior Management Team

A number of questions were asked and comments and responses made as follows:

- Timescale for full implementation will be 2015
- We will need to invest in courses and resources, including extending the student experience
- Some courses will not be affected by the changes and will be able to charge premium fees
- How do we test different models in relation to attracting students to different courses?
- What evidence can we use to inform decisions about the kind of strategy we need to move forward?
- The way student numbers will be controlled is not known but it is suspected that the current cap will continue in the first year but could change later
- International strategy is to increase overseas student numbers but it is not yet known whether there will be a UKBA cap on student entry to the UK from overseas
- Implement the clever use of data held about students to extend our knowledge of our market and inform strategy
- Need to engage with students earlier and market more effectively as well as develop courses using different and innovative modes of study
- Must be careful about making assumptions in relation to over recruiting courses especially in areas where changes in government legislation affects employment
- Must make sure that the validation process does not block the rapid development of new courses in subject areas which will extend, develop and recruit students to the academic portfolio and must make sure as far as possible that what is being developed will recruit
- Staff are brilliant, up to date and have links with industry – if they worked in industry on a regular basis this would underpin course delivery and prove to students their effectiveness
- Need to invest in development, make best use of staff expertise and the most cost effective means of delivery
- Need to decide on the balance of priorities in relation to teaching and research
- Factors that will influence students could be their final debt as well as price comparison websites

The development of new processes and academic portfolio to manage the changes to public funding should not detract from or alter the precepts of the newly developed Strategic Plan in a major way but should change and enhance it creatively.

681 Date of next meeting 21 November 2011

The meeting finished at 5.30pm

SIGNED:

DATE: