

Council

Strategy Day Notes

Date of meeting: **Tuesday, 06 June 2017**

Duration of meeting: **2.00pm to 6.00pm**

Location: **Room G5.05, High Wycombe Campus**

Attendance

Name	Role	Category of membership
Michael Hipkins	Chair	Independent
Jenny Newton	Deputy Chair	Independent
Joanna Boardman		Elected PSE Representative
Rebecca Bunting		Vice-Chancellor
Gurdeep Chadha		Independent
Joseph Collins		Students' Union President
Maggie James		Independent
Irene Kirkman		Independent
Lise Llewellyn		Independent
Tim Marshall		Co-opted
Ken McCrea		Co-opted
Anthony Murphy		Independent
Hilary Mullen		Elected Academic Representative
Susan Rosser		Independent
John Smith		Independent
Terri Teasdale		Independent
Sue West		Senate Nomination

Officers

Name	Role	Category of membership
Ellie Smith	Secretary	Clerk to the Council
Marcus Wood	Minute Secretary	N/A

In attendance

Name	Role
Sean Mackney	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education)
Tim Middleton	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research & Enterprise)

Rod Mercer	Director of Finance
Ben Palmer	Students' Union President-Elect (Observer)

Apologies

Name	Role	Category of membership
Bob Shennan		Independent
Phil Wood		Senate Nomination

Absent

Name	Role	Category of membership
Baljit Dhillon		Independent

Notes

1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting. It was noted that it was the first meeting for Rod Mercer, the newly appointed Director of Finance.

2. Financial Stability and the role of Council (Presentation)

The Chair gave a presentation from the Committee of University Chairs (CUC) Financial Sustainability Strategy Group on the "Governing Body Role in Assessing Institutional Sustainability". A copy of the presentation was saved with the notes.

3. Context, Vision and Aims by 2019 (Presentation)

The Vice-Chancellor gave an update on issues facing the Higher Education sector and reshaping of the market, the key financial challenges for the University for 2017-18, and the implications arising from the ongoing Transformation Project. A copy of the presentation was saved with the notes

Context

Were particular groupings especially affected by the issues facing the HE sector?

- There were vulnerabilities based on the size of particular institutions with less overall stability for smaller institutions – who needed to meet (and thus resource) the same reporting function as larger institutions
- Recruiting / low entry tariff institutions were deemed to be most at risk

Is there any consensus that there is overprovision at the lower end of the market?

- The sector is not getting smaller as universities continue to find ways to expand. Tradition full-time undergraduate (FTUG) figures are most affected
- There are too many London-based universities, some of which are downsizing (e.g. London Met, Kingston). Bucks very predicated on FTUG numbers and needs to diversify its provision to meet skills needs
- The overall demographic is changing with many traditional universities entering clearing for the first time following the removal of the student numbers cap

Regulators can tend to be slow to respond. To what extent are regulators 'supportive' or 'resistant' to the changes to higher education?

- Quality regulators tend to be driven by self-regulation (e.g. peer review). New Office for Students (OfS) is likely to take two years to 'bed in'
- Future HE environment considered to be deliberately under-regulated. Entry to the sector to be made very easy for new providers – though this may also mean many will be unsuccessful and will need intervention to support students
- Non-compliance is a big issue (e.g. consumer rights legislation, UKVI requirements). There may be some challenges around international recruitment following Brexit. Sector specific regulations / legislation considered to be less threatening
- Government is pushing the skills agenda, especially through the apprenticeship levy, to create more choice within the sector. Work-based learning / in-work skills development are starting to provide options
- Apprenticeship regulations are deliberately very tight ('clunky') however to reduce opportunities for fraud
- A new Industrial Strategy is expected to be prepared by the Government. This will offer opportunities for Bucks which must be seized and made to work for us
- Globally, the market continues to grow given the demand for high-level skills acquisition in a global knowledge economy

What is the level of recognition and acceptance amongst staff at the University that Bucks needs to change?

- Reaction is mixed as some staff are more entrepreneurial than others
- Plans are being shared and there is a general understanding that things are changing

Financial position

What has been the reduction in FTUG numbers at the University over the previous three years?

- There has been a reduction but it has been a significant drop this year
- Technically our numbers increased in the previous year but this was down to an increase in students enrolled at partners, principally UCFB where we only receive a management fee
- On-campus numbers have not held up

Retention is at 9.5% despite a number of initiatives. Are these initiatives not working or is it too soon to determine?

- Too soon to determine. Changes have been implemented to give early warning of students at risk of dropping out

Transformation

What will the offering look like and how are client needs being considered, e.g. the need by students to earn money?

- Apprenticeship development is a good example of this. The University has just submitted to be on the register to deliver Master's level apprenticeship programmes building capacity in this area

An assumed 20-30% projected reduction in core undergraduate numbers has serious ramifications and will lead to a significant reduction in income. What is the timescale for this reduction?

- The current Voluntary Severance Scheme (VSS) deadline is 7 June 2017 and is the first step towards major rationalisation by the University

Teaching quality will be key. What is being done in the short term to ensure teaching quality is improving and morale is still high? Students need to see that they are getting value for money out of staff.

- An NSS improvement plan has been initiated this year as there have been too many subject areas where NSS performance is deemed to be poor
- NSS results feed into the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and will inform league table positions. Planning and review processes have been changed to be more pro-active focussing on sustainable, continuous improvement, and better use of data
- Investment in the professional development of staff will be undertaken through use of the University's own contribution to the apprenticeship levy
- The message is being carefully managed to ensure positive messages are being transmitted, e.g. recent sickness absence in one department led to doubling-up of some classes and the need to ensure students were aware that contact times were not reducing overall

What can Council do to support the Transformation Project and the expertise and experience of individual members best used?

- An Advisory Board has been set up to support Transformation that is made up of chairs of Council sub-committees in a 'critical friend' role. An update will be provided to the July meeting of Council

4. Transformation Project: Actions underway and planned (Presentation)

The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) gave a more detailed presentation on the Transformation Project. A copy of the presentation was saved with the notes.

What progress has been made regarding portfolio review?

- Work has focused around growing apprenticeships, while Faculties have been asked to accelerate their current development plans
- Validations are planned for September and some programmes have been accelerated for a January start (degree apprenticeships in particular can start at any point and are not tied to an academic calendar structure)
- Evidence-based decision-making is being used to identify programmes to develop and take to market. TP is a two-year programme but there will be a point at which the money runs out so it is necessary to save money along the way

What levels of stakeholder engagement have there been? What lessons have been learned from previous experiences – especially regarding thresholds for course development – and what processes are in place?

- Academic Planning Committee was instituted to look at new proposals. APC requires robust business cases to be developed – including finance, market, capability etc. as

well as due diligence for partners. Previous weaknesses in market intelligence have been addressed.

- For apprenticeships the University is also educating employers about the opportunities available to them

What mechanisms are in place to get feedback from staff given communications can often be very challenging?

- A Transformation page has been set up on Blackboard with FAQs but as yet there has been little engagement. Workshops are being held with subject leads. The Local Joint Committee with Union representatives is also reviewing TP on a regular basis
- Perception by staff of a lack of communication and awareness about TP generally to date. Comms process should now start to click in. Delays to date due to need to have initial preparations in place

5. Introduction to the new University website and use of Social Media (Presentation)

The Director of Marketing & Student Recruitment presented the new website to Council members and outlined the University's approach to and use of social media. A copy of the presentation was saved with the minutes.

How is social media activity being monitored, e.g. to remove inappropriate content?

- All platforms are actively monitored. The University looks to respond positively where complaints / negative comments are encountered and will attempt to take the message offline with the contact (so negative messages are not reinforced)
- Try not to delete content unless it is completely inappropriate (e.g. inciting racial hatred) as this gets noticed and picked up on (concerns over censorship)

Is there still a role for a physical prospectus?

- Yes. It is expected, especially at UCAS fairs. However, producing a prospectus has implications for lead times on course development especially regarding Competitions & Markets Authority (CMA) requirements. The prospectus therefore contains clear messages about only being accurate at the time of publication and directing applicants to web content which can be updated more regularly. Problematic but just has to be managed.

Council members considered that the University was to be congratulated over its developments on this front and was demonstrating a clear understanding of the issues involved.

6. Showcasing partnerships in DMM (Presentation)

The Dean of DMM and Head of School for Arts & Creative Industries presented an update on the types of partnership in operation within the Faculty as well as some of the activities courses engaged in with employers and links to videos celebrating recent student successes. Due to the media content the presentation was too large to be stored via Blackboard.

Council members considered the presentation to be inspirational in light of the challenges facing the University and felt that engagement with industry would be fundamental to

success in achieving the University's ambitions. The Faculty was encouraged to find ways to disseminate the content of the presentation to colleagues across the University.

7. Closing remarks

The Chair summarised the challenges facing the University and considered that the examples of student success evidenced during the meeting demonstrated why the Transformation Project needed to be successful.

Signed: _____ Date: _____
(Chair of Council)

Drafted (Minute Secretary):	8-Jun-2017
Checked (Clerk to the Council):	Date
Checked (Vice-Chancellor):	Date
Confirmed for circulation (Chair):	Date