



Buckinghamshire New University

Draft:	20 February 2014
approved for circulation:	28 February 2014
confirmed by Council:	

Missenden Council

Minutes

date: **18 February 2014**
time: **4.00 pm**
location: **Carrington Room, Missenden Abbey**

Present:

Christine Beasley (Chair)	Independent Council member
Antony Bellekom	Independent Council member
Ruth Farwell	Ex officio member and Vice Chancellor
Naomi Franco	President, Students' Union
Ian Hillan	Independent Council member
Michael Hipkins	Independent Council member
Julie Irwin	Senate Nomination
Sukhie Mattu	Elected Professional Services Employee
Ken McCrea	Co-opted Council member
Jenny Newton	Independent Council member
Simon Opie	Independent Council member
Keith Ryan	Independent Council member
Linsey Taylor	Senate Nomination
Terri Teasdale	Independent Council member
Brian Tranter (Deputy Chair)	Independent Council member

Officers:

Vanessa Pilon	Registrar (Governance)
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In attendance:

Derek Godfrey	Deputy Vice Chancellor
John Cooper	Director of Finance
Shân Wareing	PVC Learning & Teaching
Ian Plover	Director of Faculty, DMM
Steve Dewhurst	Director of Business Planning
David Sines	Pro Vice Chancellor/Executive Dean, S&H
Tristan Tipping	CEO, Students' Union
Jack Badu	Vice President, Education & Welfare, Students' Union
Matt Gilbert	Vice President, Student Involvement, Students' Union

Apologies:

Antonia Byatt	Independent Council member
Baljit Dhillon	Independent Council Member
Lori Flynn	Independent Council member
Maggie James	Independent Council Member
Tim Marshall	Co-opted Council member
Hilary Mullen	Elected Academic Employee
Ellie Smith	Clerk to the Council

905 Welcome

905.1 The Chair welcomed the full Students' Union Sabbatical Team, Naomi Franco, Jack Badu and Matt Gilbert as well as the Students' Union CEO, Tristan Tipping, to contribute to the debate.

906 Declaration of potential conflicts of interest

906.1 Antony Bellekom declared an interest. It was noted that he had commissioned the University to undertake some work sub-contracted from his own company in the area of music and media.

907 HE Centre, Aylesbury (C/14/03)

907.1 Members were updated on the current position of the negotiations with Aylesbury Vale District Council (AVDC) including where AVDC had made concessions. Negotiations were continuing to achieve substantive cost certainty for the building contracts and the legal documentation would be finalised very soon.

907.2 It was noted that the BEST Board had now given its approval for the proposed arrangements and had given delegated authority to execute the documents.

908 Full-time undergraduate applications for 2014 entry (Verbal)

908.1 It was reported that Bucks student applications for 2014 entry overall were up by 6% compared with this time last year, but this was because applications to the nursing courses were high, having increased by 28%. However the NHS contract numbers are restricted and the University is not able to capitalise on the additional applicants for these courses by increasing student numbers on them. Applications to the other health related courses in S&H and courses in DMM were down by 11% & 9% respectively. Subject comparisons across the sector were not possible because figures with this level of detail were not available. However those institutions with nursing provision were thought to be in a similar position. The University is working very hard to keep the conversion rate from application to enrolment high.

909 Recent Government announcements – (Competitor data analysis for resources and retention (Verbal)

909.1 The Government Autumn Statement and HEFCE Grant letter from the Department of Business Innovation & Skills, received last week noted the relaxing of the Government's position on student number control for 2014 entry amounting to 30,000 places overall and for 2015 its removal altogether, as well as an additional cut in the teaching grant for 2014-15. This will affect the residual funding for the last year of the old fee regime and it is not yet known how this additional cut in grant will be applied. HEFCE had been given some flexibility about how to implement the cuts while prioritising as far as possible the protection of the high cost STEM subjects, Widening Participation funding and, small and specialist institutions. Research and the HEIF were protected. It was noted that there would be mechanisms in place to protect and secure the academic student experience in the event of uncontained growth following removal of the student number controls. It is predicted that there will not be many more prospective students wishing to apply to university and therefore the removal of the control will result in a redistribution of numbers around the sector. Whilst the growth of private providers does not have an impact on the teaching grant, they will come within the student number control mechanism for 2014 entry.

910 Sector Benchmarking (C/14/01)

910.1 The paper circulated included both competitor key themes and a comparative analysis of resources and retention for these competitors for 2012 to 2013. The comparator set was noted as increased to include some institutions where competition for students was in only one subject area. The University was noted as comparing well against the sector and in some areas better results than comparator universities in the sector were achieved.

910.2 A summary of the tabular results presented was provided together with proposals around how we could be more competitive. These tables included comparisons and University position in the following areas:

- Net fees and funding (in the black – not all were)
- Operating surplus as a % of income (lower middle)
- Net current assets as a % of income (high middle)
- Staff costs as a % of income (low middle)
- Academic and Facilities spend (not including staff costs) (high)
- Completion rate from the Complete University Guide (middle)
- Non-continuation rate (HESA PI) (high middle)
- Projected Degree Outcome (HESA PI) (high middle)
- Alternative league table – combination of Resources & Retention (10 out of 24)
- Subject level Staff/Student Ratio Comparison (2 courses over resourced)
- Relevance to NSS performance (NSS overall 78 and 10th against competitors)
- Qualitative competitor review (key themes in relation to promotion and differentiation)

In summary the University compares well on overall resources and is better than average for this competitor group in terms of retention.

910.3 It was suggested that to be more competitive the University should:

- Respond to competitors at subject level in curriculum delivery, accreditations, resources and marketing whilst aligning resources to subject areas of strength and sector growth
- Student satisfaction is still key to success, providing clear and accurate information to current and potential students whilst removing or reducing unanticipated costs will make us competitive and create an 'edge' where we are able to deploy added value in terms of skill development

910.4 Clarification was sought and given in a number of areas:

- The level of Staff/Student ratios clearly translated into student satisfaction but the how and the why may be very different in different subject areas
- The evidence of how the University is marketing itself is unclear to members and a more pro active and outgoing strategy including social media could contribute to raising the profile of the University externally eg, there are clear marketing advantages that are not being exploited such as advertising the University successes.

911 Additional Fee Income for 2014/15 (C/14/02)

911.1 Background information to the proposals was provided together with future risks. The strategic basis of the future spend was clearly identified together with a financial forecast for the outcomes and committed spending for 2014-15. The project to identify the best way to use the additional income received as a result of the increased fees for 2014 student entry was undertaken jointly by the University and the Students' Union and the basis for the proposals brought forward were identified through extensive consultation with both staff and students. The proposal was to implement this for all students (new and current) from September 2014.

Specific proposals were identified in the following areas with additional detail identified at the meeting in relation to competitors, costs and delivery:

- a. Support for additional course costs
- b. Learning technology – tablets for every member of staff
- c. Staff and Staff development - PhD studentships to create increasing research activity
- d. Creating more 'time' for current staff to engage in enhancements to the student experience
- e. Learning Resources
- f. Accessible campus
- g. Enhancing students employability
- h. 'Free graduation' for all students
- i. Build a better Students' Union
- j. An improved campus ambience

911.2 SMT recommended that following further discussion and debate Council approves in principle the package offered as well as the investment needed to deliver it to enable it to be marketed. A further more detailed look at the financial principles would take place at the next Resources Committee meeting in March and how that would fit in to the 2014-15 budget as well as forecasts for 2015-17.

- 911.3 The enthusiasm and commitment to this project was clearly shown through the presentations made which would both improve the student experience, the courses and curriculum offered as well as enhancing scholarship and pedagogy for staff. Considerable work had been carried out to ensure that the offering was affordable and value for money. The whole team clearly showed that their commitment was for the whole package which they thought would move the University into an improved position within the sector.
- 911.4 In particular the Students' Union stressed that in order to achieve what they recognise as great potential for the University through the 'Outrageous Ambition' and their objective that 'Opportunity is never defeated by circumstance', these proposals will ensure that the package offered by Bucks is one of the most attractive in the sector and will create a level playing field for all students, irrespective of circumstance, as well as enhancing the student experience and working environment for staff.
- 911.5 The following principles were identified to underpin these proposals as follows:
- The enhancements to the student experience should impact all students in the University from October 2014, matched to their specific needs and
 - When aggregated across the first three years of operation, the impact of the proposal should be cost neutral

The additional risks of a reduction in undergraduate recruitment, worsening progression for current students and increasing investment needed to support future IT capabilities were identified and the impact these might have on forecasts would be provided to Council through the next Resources Committee.

The top level projected costs of the proposals over the period 2014 to 2018 were shown for each of the proposed enhancements and it was noted that some of the proposals would be capitalised and funded from the existing annual Sustainability Infrastructure Fund reducing the direct impact on funds required for this project. It was also noted that the increase in Access Agreement costs in line with the increased fees being paid would be used to absorb some of the aspects of the proposal. The overall impact in year 3 was shown as close to breakeven. It was stressed that this could only be carried out within the constraints of the University's Banking Covenants.

Outline proposals for further development to enhance the High Wycombe Campus were presented in order to show the potential for future development. In addition the expenditure on projects within the annual Sustainable Infrastructure Investment Fund for 2013-14 was shown so that it was clear that using some of it for some aspects of the proposal was in keeping with its use in previous years.

- 911.6 A debate and discussion session was held with commentary and questions made and posed as follows:
- What are the priorities – the proposed package (improvements for students now) or campus development (long term improvements for future students)
 - Free graduation costs for students mean that students leave with a better view of the University
 - Free basic text books – it is important how this is managed as the administrative burden could be prohibitive although this is known to be a priority area
 - Students who have no parental experience of HE have less understanding of the financial implications of University life when they apply and when they enrol
 - Marketing this in the most advantageous way possible for the current market is central to this and requires a clearer strategy (including proximity to central London), an identified budget and continued expansion into social media networks
 - The University is competing in a closed pool and needs a better offer to attract students
 - Members fully supported the proposals but were concerned regarding both the timing of the decision because they would not have the opportunity to consider the detailed costing until Resources Committee; understanding the impact on next year's budget and the deferral of the estates strategy was important.
 - The University at this time wished to brief the Council on the current proposals and understand its top-level impact on next year's budget i.e. the possible risks to the bottom line to ascertain whether Council had an appetite to pursue the proposals. If so then the overall

costs would be presented in more detail with the fully detailed financial forecasting to the Resources Committee in March

- Word of mouth about the Big Deal attracts students to the University as a distinctive offer. Likewise this package has the potential to enhance the attractiveness of the financial offering to students, removing much uncertainty from students who are unsure about studying in HE
- It was stressed that the funding of the enhancement package was from the additional fees charged but there would be a cost implication for the first two years of its operation because the proposal was to include current students who would not be paying higher fees unlike the new students. Once all years were paying the higher fees the cost would be covered.
- The University should ensure that the courses offered are the ones which attract students and the meeting was assured that decisions to discontinue recruitment to some courses in September 2014 had already been taken – resources so released will be used to expand courses in popular niche markets which will form a springboard for expansion of student numbers as well as into related areas of study
- Clarification was sought on the move away from too many hourly paid staff to more part time and fractional contracts which would enhance the provision of teaching – it was noted that some hourly paid staff were critical to delivery for both enhanced learning and delivery on commitment but it was about improving the balance between these different contracts

911.7 A leaflet was circulated which was designed to illustrate how the proposed package might be marketed at Open Days for potential new students and included two of the improved offers under discussion namely no hidden course costs and free graduation. It was possible that this could be used at the Open Day the following day. Considerable discussion took place with the following points being made:

- Concern was expressed about making promises to students that had not been fully debated and agreed although the offer being made was for new students only who would be paying the higher fees which would cover the cost of the part of the proposals under debate and which would be marketed via the leaflet
- Support was given for using all the resources possible to attract students to study at Bucks including this leaflet
- It was confirmed that these additional offerings to students specified in the leaflet would have no serious financial implications for the University and could enhance provision through achieving additional student enrolments
- Although the future numbers of enrolled students is not known it was pointed out that if student numbers reduce the cost implications would also be lower thus mitigating some of the risks of going out to market with the package at this point.

911.8 Enthusiastic support was given to the proposed package with reservations expressed relating to the early implementation of some of the proposals and the lack of detailed financial forecasting currently available. The full financial implications, marketing and further campus development all need to be considered further before an agreement is reached on all the proposals.

Following a vote the following was AGREED:

- The full financial implications of these proposals including its implications for marketing and further campus development to be developed and presented to Resources Committee in March for consideration and recommendation to Council at the end of March
- To implement the 'free graduation' and no hidden extra costs elements of the package only for new full-time undergraduate students entering in September 2014; this would enable that detailed in the leaflet to be used to attract students at Open Days immediately
- Further implementation of the package beyond this would depend on the recommendation from Resources Committee on 18 March having considered more financial details.

(Action: SMT/Director of Finance/Students' Union)

912 Date of next meeting

912.1 The next meeting of Council is scheduled to take place on Monday 31 March 2014, commencing at 4.00 pm in room 3.07 at Uxbridge

Campus Tour available at 2.00pm

The meeting started at 4.00pm and finished at 6.20pm.

Signed: _____ Date: _____
(Chair of Council)

Prepared by: Registrar (Governance) – 20 February 2014
Checked by: Clerk to the Council – 21 February 2014
Confirmed by: Vice Chancellor – 28 February 2014
Confirmed by: The Chair – 3 March 2014