



# Buckinghamshire New University

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## Missenden Council

### Minutes

date: **14 October 2014**  
time: **4.00 pm**  
location: **Carrington Room, Missenden Abbey**

#### **Present:**

Christine Beasley (Chair)	Independent Council member
Antony Bellekom	Independent Council member
Antonia Byatt	Independent Council member
Baljit Dhillon	Independent Council member
Ruth Farwell	Ex officio member and Vice Chancellor
Matt Gilbert	President, Students' Union
Michael Hipkins (Deputy Chair)	Independent Council member
Steve Hoole	Elected Professional Services Employee
Maggie James	Independent Council member
Ken McCrea	Co-opted Council member
Hilary Mullen	Elected Academic Employee
Jenny Newton	Independent Council member
Simon Opie	Independent Council member
Keith Ryan	Independent Council member
Linsey Taylor	Senate Nomination
Terri Teasdale	Independent Council member

#### **Officers:**

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

#### **In attendance:**

Ian Plover	Deputy Vice Chancellor
Shân Wareing	Pro Vice Chancellor Learning & Teaching
Alison Chambers	Pro Vice Chancellor/Executive Dean, S&H
Vicky Vass	Pro Vice Chancellor/Executive Dean, DMM
David Bulbeck	Financial Controller
John Cooper	Consultant
Steve Dewhurst	Director of Business Planning

#### **Apologies:**

Lori Flynn	Independent Council member
Ian Hillan	Independent Council member
Tim Marshall	Co-opted Council member

**965 Welcome**

965.1 The Chair welcomed Steve Hoole, the newly elected Professional Service Employee, to the meeting.

**966 Declaration of potential conflicts of interest**

966.1 None were received.

**967 Introduction and scene setting (C/14/28 and presentation)**

967.1 The Corporate Planning Statement was introduced, having been previously circulated, as a basis for discussion of priorities and focus for 2014-15. This showed clear priorities and responsibilities for the Senior Management Team under each of the areas of the Strategic Plan, namely Student Experience, People, Partnerships, Performance and Physical Environment.

A presentation was given based on both the work undertaken over the last six months in reaching the current proposals and the main aspects of the plans for 2014/15 as follows:

- Student Experience
  - Faculty Plans for developing portfolio including new delivery models
  - Review of 'Bucks in Slough' ('coldspot' delivery)
  - Delivery of the Enhancement of the Student Experience package
  - Planning for the opening of the University Campus Aylesbury Vale
  - Improved NSS performance in the areas of three week turn-around of feedback, module evaluation and personal tutoring
- People
  - Improvements in staff survey results in the area of communication as a whole and between teams
  - Enhance ability to measure performance of activities and drive improvements through active monitoring
  - Development activities for managers
  - External recognition
  - Continue Professional Development Review momentum
- Partnerships
  - Refreshing the partnership strategy
  - Nurturing and extending our work with the NHS
  - creating new commercial partnerships
- Performance – in the areas of recruitment, financial, international activities and commercial activities including through BEST and research
- Physical Environment
  - Preparation for the next stage of the estates strategy
  - Meeting the needs of the potential NHS expansion and other growth
  - Missenden Abbey
  - Routine investment and maintenance

In addition an update was given on the current enrolment and budget position. The overall current position with respect to student enrolments at the University was an improvement on the budget position by about 5%.

**967.2 Plenary Discussion/reactions from members on the approach**

Disappointment was expressed regarding the University's position in the recent Sunday Times league table. It was stressed that the disappointing NSS scores informed these and whilst many improvements have been realised in the areas of increased numbers of 1<sup>st</sup> class and 2.1 results as well as graduate prospects/employability increasing by 10%, these were weighted lower than the NSS scores in the range of measures used in the league tables. Outside commentary received on the University position in league tables indicates that they cannot understand the low results achieved by the University. It was thought that there is a lag time between active measures being put in place to improve NSS scores and the improved scores being realised.

**968 National Student Survey (NSS) (C/14/29 and presentation)**

968.1 The following papers were received for discussion:

- Graph and Heat Chart for 2014
- Executive Summary on NSS results
- University actions for autumn 2014
- University targets for 2014
- Benchmarking Bucks and setting targets
- Contextual Factors
- Immediate and longer term improvements
- University targets for 2015
- Bucks targets for Question 22 for 2015-2020
- NSS questions

It was noted that although the overall completion rate for the NSS had increased it had not improved as much as had been targeted. Despite improvements in % scores of some of the NSS questions, the University remained in the bottom quartile in comparison with both competitor set universities and GuildHE universities. The considerable hard work that had been put into providing feedback on assessments to students within the three week turnaround period set (90% plus) had produced an improvement of 4% in the relevant score. It was explained that the NSS is a perception rather than a quality survey and stressed that the HESA recruitment, progression, achievement and employability data clearly show the quality of the University courses and the value they add. It was thought that the HESA data should be used more to raise students' and staff morale.

Proposals for future improvements planned now and over a longer period of time included:

- Explicit dialogue with and responsiveness to students
- Explore and support areas which stand out as poorly performing
- Investment in academic enhancement, including assessment and academic staff support and development
- Better use of diagnostic feedback and metrics
- Improvements in the use of and access to learning resources
- Enhancing students personal development into curriculum and co-curriculum
- NSS targets set progressively for the next six years to take the University into the top quartile for their competitor set

**968.2 Plenary Discussion/reactions from members on the approach**

Considerable discussion took place and commentary was made as follows:

- Feeling that six years was a long timescale to target improvements but noted that a poor student experience in the first year of study continued to be reflected in the student survey completed in year three
- Share good practice across the University from courses that perform well across the board, including buddying with those poorer performing courses
- Focus on strengths to provide courses with both a national and local profile but ensure that the offering is in line with both strategy and expertise
- The higher score in prompt feedback might be at the expense of the quality of feedback; however, it was noted that the University External Examiners monitor this and endorse the quality of feedback, making few critical comments in this area
- The NSS performance is often a perception of what students think rather than a reality and sometimes communication by staff makes a difference eg Art and Design students receive constant feedback on their work within teaching but do not consider it as feedback unless it is formalised
- It was thought that whilst help should be given to courses with the lowest scores, higher levels of improvement might be achieved by targeting those middle of the road courses to translate these into improved NSS scores
- Noted the high level of scoring for satisfaction for the Students' Union

- Improvement in all areas is the right thing for students but it must be undertaken in a sustainable way over time for all delivery, including those courses already doing well, doing even better

## **969 Plans for International Activities (Presentation)**

969.1 A vision for International Recruitment was provided in a presentation “International as an added value proposition”. The current position of the University in the market place was noted as well as the position of both the UK and HE sector within the global education market. Challenges for the University were clearly identified and a strategy of Grow, Exchange, Explore and Engage was fully explained. This included a marketing strategy inclusive of branding, reputation and unique selling point. Creating relationships takes time and effort. Work is currently being undertaken with South Africa where a visit has already taken place and relationships progressed in what could be a large growth area. Actions currently in place include development of an inclusive strategy in the following areas:

- Review of return on investment, shape, size and future integration, geographical spread, agents contracts, systems processes and policies, Government approvals – select committee
- Areas of concentration include
  - Grow direct recruitment of high quality students
  - Enhance our TNE offer with high quality partners
  - Capitalise on wider university benefits of international agenda
  - Ensure an improved contribution/margin to add to surpluses

## **969.2 Plenary Discussion/reactions from members on the approach**

Discussion took place and commentary was made as follows:

- International recruitment includes both attracting students to study in the UK as well as setting up partnerships for courses delivered locally
- It adds value to learning and teaching as well as research
- Clarification was sought on Trans-national Education (TNE) which is either delivered or co-delivered locally in the country of origin by University Staff. It was stressed that considerable experience was in place internally in the delivery of this and a rigorous process of quality assurance and due diligence takes place in advance ensuring that only partners of the highest calibre are approved
- The University is working closely with The British Council around the world to ensure that local expertise and intelligence is used in developing partnerships
- On-line delivery is being considered not just for international activities but in selective areas across the board

## **970 Proposals for use of Contingency Funds (C/14/30 and presentation)**

970.1 A summary of the use of some of these funds, which related to lower than expected shortfall in student numbers, was noted. This left a balance of contingency funds which could be set aside for investment projects. Details of the current position on enrolled student numbers for both new and returning students were explained. It was noted that returning student numbers were continuing to rise as more students underwent the re-enrolment process.

Clarification was sought regarding a number of empty rooms at Brook Street Halls of Residence. It was noted that all the other halls of residence were full, including the new ones at CSV, Hughenden and that all head tenancies had now been removed. Returning students were using private tenancy arrangements rather than Halls of Residence and the opportunity to use them would be communicated. However, interest has been expressed in relation to the use of these empty rooms by UCFB, Amersham & Wycombe College as well as international students and it is thought that spare capacity will be substantially reduced.

970.2 Council were presented with a proposal for a Centre of Excellence in Sport, Exercise and Wellbeing. The background information to support this proposal is as follows:

- Building on existing academic strengths in health and sports provision to create an innovative academic portfolio integrating teaching, research and enterprise
- The University is well placed in the local area to capitalise on the English Institute of Sport, National Sports Centre at Bisham Abbey and Bucks NHS Trust at Stoke Mandeville's National Centre for Spinal Injuries which provides a unique opportunity to develop academic specialty around paralympic and disability sport
- Closely aligned to the University's Strategic Plan and Mission
- Provides foundations for growth across a number of academic programme levels and provides a significant improvement to existing research strengths supporting our applications for the 2020 Research Excellence Framework (REF) and Research Degree Awarding Powers (RDAP)
- Option 1 in addition includes the development of The Buckinghamshire Sports Injury and Rehabilitation Clinic

Three options were detailed and it was explained that whilst the first more expensive option was the preferred one, choosing this one would depend on final student numbers and funding availability. It would also require a capital investment bid to enable refurbishment of the High Wycombe estate to house the centre. Indicative potential student numbers, income, on-going and set up costs were shown.

It was stressed that the University was uniquely placed to fill a gap in the market and with the expertise to deliver this combination of subject areas both geographically and with links to the English Institute of Sport at Bisham Abbey, British Paralympic Association and the Disability rehabilitation centre at Stoke Mandeville Hospital within the County. The agreements signed with the Bucks Health Care Trust for postgraduate study will also support this venture. This will provide facilities for an increased portfolio of undergraduate study and learning and teaching as well as commercial income and increased research and postgraduate study. It was noted that this has been market tested through the Business Planning Directorate and budget costs prepared by the Finance Directorate. There will also need to be investment in staff as the University does not currently have therapists on the payroll.

Questions were asked and clarification provided as follows:

- Members were impressed with the vision but would like details of the full business case
- Development to be undertaken in South Wing with the clinic on the ground floor behind the already approved multi-functional space and teaching above on the first floor with the set up costs provided and capital expenditure noted
- Early support was sought to ensure that the courses to be offered are included on the UCAS website as early as possible to enable recruitment for 2015 intake
- The business case shows that once students are enrolled the project will pay for itself. In addition this type of centre was noted as having been successful elsewhere

It was AGREED that the proposals were approved in principle and plans could move forward on condition that a full business case is presented to next Resources Committee for scrutiny and for discussion in the context of information about the University's financial position..

**(Action: PVC Faculty of Society & Health, Financial Controller, Director of Business Planning and Clerk to the Council)**

970.3 The provision of an extended Strategic Planning and Development Directorate was proposed. The reasoning behind the proposals was based on an enhanced performance, development and planning model which were fully explained as follows:

- Information, intelligence and metrics across a wide range of priority areas that informs forward planning, actions and target setting within a balance scorecard
- A programme management resource to ensure that resources applied to projects produce the service and facilities benefits that were intended
- A single source of student enrolment, recruitment, income and human resources data used for budget setting, reporting, forecasting and performance management
- More systematic and comprehensive market and sector intelligence to inform development

The Faculty Performance and Information Sets under a 'Stock-take' Model in Phase 1 & 2 Development (2014-15) were fully detailed.

The current position and staffing levels were clearly explained and approval sought to increase staffing to enable forward planning, better informed decision making, performance monitoring on clear information and metrics across the University as well as at faculty, school and department level. This would enable the University to develop information more systematically and identify what makes a top quartile subject area as well as what the University needs to do to achieve it.

It was explained that normally Council would not be asked to approve specifically increased staffing of the kind proposed. This would normally be incorporated into budget lines. However, this increased expenditure could not be included since a prudent budget was set for 2014/15 to allow for the exceptional contingency fund in the event that the level of student recruitment was below the original budget. The student enrolled numbers are now known and higher than budgeted, and it was felt that this would be an excellent use of some of the contingency funds to enable planning to drive future developments and performance in a more systematic and informed manner. The Senior Management Team wholeheartedly supported the work currently undertaken by the Business Planning Directorate and acknowledge that with extra staffing the information provided would be more extensive and useful. Members could see the potential for more informed decision making but expressed reservations about the on-going costs of implementation.

- 970.4 It was AGREED that the proposals for increased staffing in the Business Planning Directorate be approved in principle and be confirmed when the University's financial position consequent upon the student enrolments is reported to the next Resources Committee.

**(Action: PVC Faculty of Society & Health, Financial Controller, Director of Business Planning and Clerk to the Council)**

**971 Approval of the Corporate Planning Statement 2014-15 (C/14/28)**

971.1 This was fully discussed earlier under agenda item 3.

971.2 It was AGREED that the Corporate Planning Statement for 2014-15 is APPROVED.

**972 Vice Chancellor Recruitment**

972.1 The Chair updated Council members on the current status of the recruitment process for the new VC to succeed Ruth Farwell. It was reported that 34 applications had been received and from these a shortlist of six candidates (2 male/4 female including 1 BME) had been selected for interview. The six candidates would each be attending a pre-interview Selection Day where they would have the opportunity to tour the University's campuses and meet with a range of staff and students during the w/c 20 October 2014, followed by a formal interview on 27/28 October 2014. The formal interview panel comprised of three members of Council, the SU President and an external who had recent experience of a VC role.

The Chair further clarified that whilst the appointment of the new VC was the responsibility of Council, Council had previously agreed to delegate their authority to the Appointments Committee and interview panel and therefore Council's role would be to ratify the decision of the interview panel once the candidate has been selected. On the assumption that the interview process proved successful the intention would be to hold a special Council meeting on Tuesday 4 November 2014 at 6.00pm in G5.05 immediately following the scheduled Resources Committee to receive feedback from the interview panel and ratify the panel's decision.

**973 Date of next meeting**

973.1 The next meeting of Council is scheduled to take place on:

Monday 24 November 2014, commencing at 4.00 in the Boardroom (Joint Meeting with Senate)  
Monday 24 November 2014 commencing at 5.30pm in the Boardroom (Council Meeting)

The meeting started at 4.00 pm and finished at 6.30pm.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Chair of Council)

Prepared by: Registrar (Governance) – 16 October 2014  
Checked by: Clerk to the Council – 20 October 2014  
Confirmed by: Vice Chancellor – 23 October 2014  
Confirmed by: The Chair – 31 October 2014