

THE UNIVERSITY OF LANCASTER

Minutes of a meeting of the Council
held on 27 April 2007

PRESENT: Mr B. M. Gray (in the chair), Vice-Chancellor, Dr L. J. Banton, Councillor A. C. Bryning, Mr A. Dick, Mr J. Hadfield, Professor S. Henig, Mr G. Johnson, Dr M. M. Lee, Mr S. A. J. Leyton, Mr G. Middlebrook, Mr H. Morris, Ms S. Palmer, Mr T. Roca, Professor A. Siewierska, Professor D. B. Smith, Professor K. J. Stringer, Mr R. Turner.

IN ATTENDANCE: Miss F. M. Aiken, Professor A. G. Chetwynd, Mr P. M. Graves, Professor R. D. McKinlay, Professor T. J. McMillan, Mr A. C. Neal, Mr M. Swindlehurst. Representatives from John McAslan & Partners, and Lancaster City Council were in attendance for item CO.07/35.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Mr P. R. Elliott.

CO.07/30 Presentation: Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Colleges and the Student Experience

Document: GAP/2007/0372

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Colleges and the Student Experience gave a presentation on a recently completed which had asked for the views of 2nd year undergraduate and all postgraduate students on the non-academic aspects of their experiences at Lancaster. There had been an excellent response rate, and thanks were due to academic staff and LUSU for their work in encouraging students to reply to the survey. The following topics were covered in the survey:

- Entertainment and sports facilities
- Opportunities to get involved
- College facilities
- Support and health services
- Learning spaces

- Shops and catering
- Careers provision.

The overall results were very encouraging with more than 80% of students rating their experience at Lancaster as good or excellent. However, across individual student groups, undergraduates tended to be more satisfied than postgraduates and UK students more satisfied than EU/internationals students.

When students were asked to list the aspects of Lancaster they rated most highly UK undergraduates cited the colleges as the best aspect of life at Lancaster and EU/international students the opportunity to meet students from other nationalities.

When students were asked to say what they would like to be changed, a surprising number of UK students expressed unhappiness with what they saw as a strong drinking culture at the University. Other areas highlighted as needing possible improvement included sports facilities and the provision of more learning facilities which could be used for group work and where food was permitted.

The survey also indicated:

- a high level of satisfaction with the general campus location, environment and facilities;
- similar levels of satisfaction with student societies, college offices, central support services and shops;
- that areas where more than 25% of students had indicated their dissatisfaction included music concerts on campus, Barker House Farm and careers advice (particular that delivered in academic departments);
- students' varying experience of the quality of different categories of facilities across the colleges.

Many of the areas where students had expressed dissatisfaction were ones in which the University was already taking actions, which included:

- moving CEEC to a much more visible location adjacent to Alexandria Square and the increasing the amount of careers advice delivered by CEEC in departments;
- the planned new sports centre;
- the planned provision of more shared learning space on campus in the form of learning grids;
- the opening of a new facilities in Graduate College, including a central college room, a games room and a new computing facility.

The overall survey results would be reported to the Senate, and detailed comments made about specific areas would be sent to the appropriate divisional heads. A newsletter summarising the results of the survey would also be sent to all students.

The survey had proved extremely useful in finding out the views of students and informing policy decisions, and a similar exercise would be carried out in two year's time.

The following points were made in discussion:

- (a) it was noted that although possible location of future learning grids for students was still under discussion, the results of the survey suggested that students generally favoured central facilities;
- (b) it would be important to ensure the needs of part-time students were addressed in future developments of this kind;
- (c) CEEC was already experiencing much higher levels of usage by students after its recent move;
- (d) the survey results suggested that research students identified more closely with their department and faculty (as opposed to graduate college);
- (e) the importance of remembering the needs of students who might be experiencing loneliness and isolation and of ensuring that the support networks in place (which included central support services, college staff and departmental tutors) were in a position to identify people who needed help;
- (f) that other universities had expressed interest in what was seen as a pioneering project and the intention of carrying out similar surveys themselves.

THE COUNCIL RESOLVED to receive the report and to thank Professor Chetwynd for her presentation.

CO.07/31 Minutes: 23 March 2007

Document: GAP/2007/0373

THE COUNCIL RESOLVED to approve the minutes as set out.

CO.07/32 Rolling schedule of business

Document: GAP/2007/0374

THE COUNCIL RESOLVED to note the rolling schedule of business.

CO.07/33 Vice-Chancellor's Report

Document: VC/07/R050

The Vice-Chancellor reported that he had asked the University Secretary to review the University's emergency response procedures in the light of the tragic events at Virginia Tech. He also reported that no Lancaster students were known to have been involved.

He drew attention to his written report and his attendance at the HEFCE Annual Conference, at which the following key issues had been considered:

- the current consultation exercise on possible future methodologies for distributing teaching monies;
- the allocation of research monies following RAE 2008, including the implications of HEFCE's advice that they would base this on the basis of Unit of Assessments' research profiles rather than the average of the individual staff research grades within each UoA;
- the implications of the Leitch review and the government's policy of promoting employer engagement in F.E. and H.E.

He reminded the Council of the many challenges currently facing Lancaster and the H.E. sector as a whole, which included:

- the recommendations coming from the Burgess review (which included a proposed new national credit transfer system);
- possible changes to the admissions system for undergraduates;
- the need to meet the increased payroll costs arising from last year's pay settlement and the pay modernisation process;
- changing demographics, which could mean fewer potential home students coming into the system;
- the volatility of overseas recruitment.

All the indicators suggested that there would be no real increase in direct government H.E. funding after 2009, and the review of student fees planned for this year would therefore be of particular significance.

THE COUNCIL RESOLVED to receive the report

Document: FO/07/37; FO/07/23 (previously circulated); FO/07/31 (previously circulated)

(a) **REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND RESOURCES**

The Director of Finance and Resources, Mr Andrew Neal, drew attention to his written report before the Council.

He also reported that a review of the University's finance processes had recently been completed, and it was hoped that the resulting recommendations would lead to significant savings and freeing of resources within the University.

(B) **MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS**

THE COUNCIL RESOLVED to receive and note the Management Accounts as at 31 January 2007 and 28 February 2007.

(C) **PHASE 4 FINANCIAL CLOSE - UPDATE**

The Director of Finance and Resources reported that:

- all legal documents and the master agreement were close to their final form, with no major outstanding issues;
- the Project Company had agreed to bear any costs arising from further increases in long-term interest rates that exceeded the variation currently allowed for in the agreement, and the rent levels had therefore been finalised at the level previously reported.

However, the final approval process with Dexia had still to be completed, and this was now expected to take place on 14 May. For this reason the Authorised Signatories Group had agreed to extend the Early Works agreement with Norwest Holst to 28 May, with a maximum liability of £5.5m.

In taking this decision, the Group had noted that under the latest proposed financial arrangements in the agreement there was a theoretical possibility that there could be a small amount of senior debt outstanding beyond the expiry of the 38th year of the term should a termination event occur prior to the senior debt having been repaid (which could theoretically be post year 38). In this unlikely eventuality the senior lenders' protections in the direct agreement would require the University to pay termination compensation either by instalments or a lump sum. In reality, however, any possible liability was highly unlikely to exceed the rentals from the Project Co. accommodation, and the Group took

the view that this did not infringe the Council's requirement that the University (whether actually or contingently) should not be liable to make payments from its retained estate to the Project Company in addition to the rents receivable from the Project Co. after the 38th year of the lease term.

The Authorised Signatories would meet again to approve final financial close, once all remaining required consents and approvals had been obtained.

THE COUNCIL RESOLVED to:

- (i) receive and note the Director's reports;
- (ii) note the actions taken by the Authorised Signatories Group.

CO.07/35 Estates Master Plan

Document: FO/07/44

Representatives of the Architects McAslan made a presentation on the proposed latest version of an Estates Master Plan for the future development of the University. In the course of the presentation, which included slides showing the current and possible future configurations of buildings and landscape features across the University campus, they drew attention to the following points:

1. the plan covered a possible 5 – 10 year period;
2. the importance of the University's relationship with the city;
3. the limits on expansion possible within the current campus envelop;
4. the possible uses of the University's new estate acquisitions, including land on the other side of the M6;
5. the many positive features of the University's campus which included:
 - its setting in an area of natural beauty;
 - the human scale of the campus and its buildings, its logical layout and good interior circulation;
 - the separation of traffic from the pedestrian network;
6. the possible negative features, which included:
 - some unwieldy conglomerations of buildings;
 - the increasing difficulties experienced by visitors in navigating through some parts of the campus;
 - the lack of a clearly defined entrance to the University;
 - some unresolved spaces where the intended use was unclear.

They recommended that the following priorities should guide future planning:

- modernisation of spaces and routes for pedestrians;
- improving the presentation of key social facilities;
- creating more landscape features on campus, especially in spaces that currently had no clear use;
- establishing more clearly defined districts across campus;
- creating a easily identified main pedestrian entrance for the University (one possibility being the development of an entrance point adjacent to the Chaplaincy Centre, which was one of the University's iconic buildings).

They concluded by drawing attention to the long-term possibilities available from any future use of the adjacent land owned by the University, which could eventually become a necessity to allow future growth, given the natural limits to further expansion within the current campus perimeter.

In discussion the following points were made by Council members and in response to questions put to McAslan's:

- (a) that if it was decided in the future to develop an entrance area adjacent to the Chaplaincy Centre, care should be taken to ensure this did not become dominated by traffic usage;
- (b) that McAslan's believed the scale and layout of the South West Campus worked well, but that better access routes and connectivity with the rest of the campus were required;
- (c) that possible estates issues arising from the proposed new science park development (including connecting routes) had not yet been addressed in the plan;
- (d) that the likely requirement of easy access routes from South West Campus to any new Sports Centre development adjacent to the lake needed consideration;
- (e) that future development of the estate might require some small-scale demolition of a few existing buildings;
- (f) the need to ensure that the Colleges were included in current and future consultations about the Master Plan;
- (g) that account would need to be taken of the city council's development plan in any discussions about possible future uses of land beyond the current campus perimeter.

THE COUNCIL RESOLVED:

- (i) to give a broad welcome to the principles set out in the draft Estates Plan, whilst noting:
 - that these principles were intended to inform the consideration of future proposals for the development of the estate, rather than providing a detailed blueprint;

- that individual project proposals for future campus developments would continue to be subject to the normal appraisal and approval procedures;
- (ii) to note that the plan would now be considered by the Estates Committee;
- (iii) to ask that Council members be invited to the relevant meeting of the Estates Committee and given an opportunity to comment on the proposed final version of the plan before it was approved for general circulation.

CO.07/36 Corporate Governance: Update on Council Effectiveness

Document: VC/07/R046 and Appendix (VC/07/R044)

The Pro-Chancellor presented a document reviewing the progress made towards implementing the proposals arising from the Council Effectiveness Review in 2005, and identifying some issues for possible consideration that had arisen during discussions between the Pro-Chancellor and individual Council members. These included various ideas for how Council members might be given the opportunity for greater involvement in the life of the University and a suggestion that lay members of Council should only be invited to serve on the chair appointing committees where their own direct experiences, skills and expertise were most appropriate. He stressed that these points were being put forward as ideas and possibilities rather than as firm proposals.

The following points were amongst those made in discussion:

- (a) to need to ensure that any away days arranged for council members were carefully planned to ensure the time committed was used constructively;
- (b) that encouraging direct linkages between individual council members and specific departments or colleges could carry the danger creating an imbalance in how their interests were taken into account in discussion of proposals to Council that could affect them;
- (c) that council members were strongly encourage to follow up the thematic presentations made by university officers at the start of each council meeting by putting questions to them outside of the meetings;
- (d) the difficulties already experienced in ensuring that the requirement for all chair appointing committees included a lay member of Council was always met and the danger that these could be exacerbated if the pool of available members was reduced;

- (e) that consideration should be given to allowing suitable lay persons who were not members of Council to serve in this capacity and/or removing the inclusion of a lay person as an automatic requirement;
- (f) that the appointment of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor was made from among the Pro-Vice-Chancellors already appointed, and was in the gift of the Vice-Chancellor.

THE COUNCIL RESOLVED:

- (i) to receive and note the report;
- (ii) to ask the Human Resources Committee to consider the issues raised regarding the composition of chair appointing committees and to make proposals;
- (iii) that consideration of the appointment process for the Deputy Vice-Chancellor should follow on from any future review of the appointing procedures for all senior university officers.

CO.07/37 Key Institutional Risks

Documents: FO/07/40

THE COUNCIL RESOLVED to note the key institutional risks, as set out.

CO.07/38 Key Performance Indicators

- (a) Balanced score card
- (b) Thematic report on staffing

THE COUNCIL RESOLVED to:

- (i) receive and note the latest balanced score card and thematic report on staffing;
- (ii) reiterate the importance of achieving a higher rate of participation in staff appraisal across the University

CO.07/39 Recommendations of the Nominations Committee

Document: VC/07/R053

THE COUNCIL RESOLVED, on the recommendation of the Nominations Committee, to appoint the following persons to Council for three years (to commence as soon as may be mutually agreed):

Mr Brian Scowcroft (subject to confirmation of his willingness to serve);
Professor Harry Thomason

CO.07/40 Review of current meeting

Council members expressed themselves happy with the arrangements made.