

LANCASTER UNIVERSITY

Minutes of a meeting of the Council
held on 29 April 2005

PRESENT: Mr B. Gray (in the chair), Vice-Chancellor, Professor A. G. Chetwynd, Mr A. Dick, Mr J. C. Dunning, Mr P. R. Elliott, Mr R. Emslie, Mr M. Freeman, Mr M. Hart, Professor S. Henig, Mrs C. T. Hensman, Mr G. Johnson, Professor M. W. Kirby, Dr M. M. Lee, Mr S. A. J. Leyton, Mr G. Middlebrook, Mr H. Morris, Mr R. A. Neal, Dr C. C. Park, Professor P. Rowe, Mr T. Shepherd, Professor D. B. Smith, Mr B. Sneddon, Mr R. Turner.

IN ATTENDANCE: Miss F. M. Aiken, Mr B. Forde, Mr J. J. Gallagher, Mrs M. E. McClintock, Mr A. C. Neal, Mr R. O'Brien, Ms V. Robertshaw, Ms C. Simpson, Ms V. Tyrrell, Mr A. Whitaker.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Mr D. Brockbank, Councillor A. C. Bryning, Professor C. Cooper, Mr H. Dawson, Professor R. Macdonald, Professor R. D. McKinlay, Mr K. Royales, Professor K. J. Stringer, Mr M. Swindlehurst.

CO.05/33 Future positioning of the university

Document: AR/2005/322

The Vice-Chancellor indicated that it was his intention to refresh the university's Strategic Plan over the period to October 2006, and presented an indicative timetable for this process.

He presented data on higher education in the UK for 2002-03, and in particular where Lancaster was positioned relative to the rest of the sector in the composition of the student body, on widening participation, on income, and on financial security. He also showed comparative data for the three-faculty structure, covering staff and student numbers, sources of income, selected measures per full-time equivalent member of staff (income, research students and publication output), and suggested the different horizons for future growth in each of the three.

Finally, the Vice-Chancellor indicated that the main challenges for the future were in his view:

- (a) to enhance the quality of the student experience;
- (b) to increase research volume;
- (c) to be fast and flexible;
- (d) to increase the university's reputation and standing;
- (e) to make a commitment to sustainable internalisation,

and briefly explained the key factors involved in each of these.

The Pro-Chancellor noted that a significant change had taken place during his period as Pro-Chancellor in the university's capacity not only to set its future strategy, but in the direction and speed of travel. Council would need to change to assist this new approach, and there would be important supporting strategies; for example, the colleges as part of the student experience. In a world where space and time mattered less than for previous generations, the need for Lancaster to work through the Vice-Chancellor's five challenges would be vitally important.

In discussion the following points were amongst those made:

- (a) that the targets might have been given more focus and quantification. The Council was assured that a later draft would show how the new proposed targets related to the 2003 version of the Plan;
- (b) that regional strategy and outreach remained of key importance;
- (c) that work on making Lancaster's showing in national league tables relate more directly to its performance should be undertaken, including the authenticity of the data supplied. The Council was reminded that the international league tables would become increasingly important;
- (d) that a new human resources strategy was under discussion, and that the rate of growth in overseas students was slowing down, in line with the rest of the sector;
- (e) that the sector was becoming less amenable to carrying an unreasonable regulatory load, with related demands for ever-increasing data;
- (f) that emphasis should be placed on Lancaster's will to be competitive.

THE COUNCIL RESOLVED to:

- (i) receive and note the data presented;
- (ii) welcome the review of the Strategic Plan;
- (iii) invite the Vice-Chancellor to update the Council at its October 2005 meeting on the performance to date in relation to the 2003 action plans.

CO.05/34 Lancaster IT provision in the North-West

Document: AR/2005/323

Mr Barry Forde, on behalf of himself and Mr John Gallagher, gave a presentation on Lancaster's regional networking activities. He stressed the benefits to the university and the region of the close and unusual collaboration between the Department of Computing and Information Systems Services. He briefly outlined the regional partners with the university, the development of CANLMAN across higher and further education institutions of Cumbria and Lancashire, and the development of CLEO (Cumbria and Lancashire Education Online) that was connecting schools in the same area to the Internet at broadband speeds. As well as the main CLEO network, there was a separate contract with Cumbria County Council to provide their schools with additional services. In addition, the Trans-Regional Broadband Super Highway had been set up, funded by the NWDA, with links from Carlisle to Warrington, and potentially onwards to Chester, that supported e-science in the North West. More recently, the process of local loop unbundling meant that it would increasingly be possible, for example, for students and staff to receive electronically-produced interchangeably at Bailrigg and at their local residence.

The Council was reminded that some of the activity described was the responsibility of LU Network Services. In response to questions, the Council was told:

- (a) that there was the potential to extend the Lancaster networks over the Pennines to other Northern Way higher education institutions;
- (b) that Lancaster's direct network with the schools was the only one of its kind in the country;
- (c) that the facilities provided through local loop unbundling might assist the institutional travel plan, especially if it became bi-directional.

THE COUNCIL RESOLVED to receive and note the information on the regional network, and to thank Mr Forde and Mr Gallagher for it.

CO.05/35 The colleges: expectations and constrains

Documents: AR/2005/324; AR/2005/335

Mr Whitaker explained that the presentation was to update the Council from its discussion earlier in the year. He reminded the Council of the support the colleges gave to students, and their changing role forty years into the history of the university. The key questions to be addressed were identified as being the identification of the distinctiveness of the college structure at Lancaster, what future role the colleges should play, and how

they could best be funded for the purpose. The answers to these questions were intended to enable the colleges to fulfil the opportunities available to them. In order to facilitate this process, four inter-related projects had been set up:

- (A) a comparison with other collegiate universities in England and with a selection of those using standard halls of residence, to test the distinctiveness of Lancaster's arrangements, and a project officer had been identified for this work;
- (B) a review of how more active involvement of academic staff should be encouraged, especially amongst younger staff, in which Ohio State University interns would participate;
- (C) alternative funding models for the colleges that were the subject of discussions between Mr Whitaker and the Director of Finance and Resources;
- (D) the governance and management within each individual college and as part of the university. The LU Students' Union and the junior common rooms would be involved in the projects.

In discussion the following points were amongst those made:

- (a) that consideration should be given to what league table advantages might be secured by cooperation and collaboration between the collegiate universities;
- (b) that the two colleges that had been relocated to Alexandra Park had each made that decision themselves;
- (c) that there would be opportunity for continued input into the projects and their outcome by members of the Council;
- (d) that the attention of the Council to the colleges might not be proportionate to their crucial importance for the university.

THE COUNCIL RESOLVED to receive and note Mr Whitaker's report on progress and to thank him for it.

CO.05/36 Council effectiveness

Documents: AR/2005/295; AR/2005/262 (revised)

Mrs McClintock briefly introduced the executive summary of the responses from the effectiveness review, together with the detailed analysis of the returns. She thanked members for their observations and comments, while noting that the weight of numerical replies had to be balanced against the written comments.

She drew attention to the Council's broad satisfaction with the key features of the Council's responsibilities, and noted that the replies had suggested that discussion in human resources was under-represented in the Council's business. While it was the case that lay and non-lay

members' views diverged, the areas where they concurred should be considered as of particular significance: examples were the proportionate use of the time of Council meetings in relation to the importance of the business, about the way debate is elicited, and about how conclusions are reached.

Members had been asked for matters on which Council discussion in the next twelve months would be welcomed. The replies indicated (in no order of priority): the reputation and standing of the university, including internationally; income generation, including the private sector and Third Mission; student life and welfare, including the colleges; and the role and impact of the new residences, as well as those being refurbished.

Members had also been quite self-critical, including about their own lack of involvement on occasions, with unwillingness in certain cases to press a point or seek out senior officers subsequently. The question was in what ways the university and its senior officers could sensibly and usefully assist and enable more pro-activity and challenge by members of the Council.

The Council was told that there were expected to be actions to be taken that were individually modest but, taken together, should make a significant difference. Members were also invited to contribute their suggestions for changes in the light of the findings from the effectiveness review.

Members affirmed their approval in general terms of the above report and in discussion the following points were added.

- (a) Additional ordinary meetings of the Council might be held.
- (b) There should be greater focus on issues of substance, and these should be more clearly signalled by senior officers and by Council committees.
- (c) Business might be seen as falling into two categories, of initial deliberation and consultation, and later of final resolution.
- (d) Further thought should be given about presentations as a formal part of Council proceedings.
- (e) The recent change of venue had already improved the conduct of business.

THE COUNCIL RESOLVED to:

- (i) to receive and note the report, prior to a discussion at the June meeting of proposals for actions arising from it;
- (ii) to consider in June whether the Council should continue to have an annual meeting specifically dedicated to strategic or generic issues.

CO.05/37 Corporate governance

Documents: AR/2005/293; AR/2005/294; AR/2005/296; AR/2005/297

Miss Aiken briefly indicated the documents laid before the Council, and reported that the working party on corporate governance, meeting earlier in the day, had agreed that the document previously considered by the Council needed further change. It should contain passages: on the nature of the English universities and their position as neither private nor public sector bodies; on the interrelationship between the Council, the Senate and the Court; on the aims of the current review; on the distinction between the executive and non-executive arms of government; at the formulation of governance procedures that were not too burdensome but did not carry undue risk; on the role and relationship of the individual lay officers of the university; and on how people could become members of the Nominations Committee.

The reworking of the document would also include the issues raised by members at the current meeting. It would be sent to the working party members for comment, as well as to the Council for information, prior to its use as an internal consultative paper. The working party would receive feedback from the internal process before it consulted externally, including with external nominating bodies. In response to a request made by a member of the Council, agreement had been reached that the special meeting of the Court should be held in October rather than September. The intention remained that date of implementation should be October 2006, and that six months should be allowed for the Privy Council to consider and respond to formal recommendations from the university.

In discussion the following points were amongst those made.

- (a) If the working party report were to be redrafted in the way described, it should not go out for consultation before it had been back to the Council for that body to assert its ownership of its content. The Council was told that the changes would be of format and of the enhancement of the explanatory material supporting the draft proposals, which would continue not to have the status of formal recommendations.

- (b) The Council should expect to receive formal recommendations, including changes to the instruments of governance, in November 2005 and again in January or February 2006.
- (c) The working party had discussed the relevance of the analogy with an annual general meeting of shareholders and had agreed to move away from it: instead, it was intended that best practice from the private and public sectors should be incorporated. The proposals were not intended to lessen the checks and balances in the governance structure, nor to increase the level of risk: rather, the working party intended to give clarity about where responsibility resided, especially between the executive and non-executive, that would minimise risk.
- (d) The working party had taken account of the feedback received to date and would continue to do so. If the Council was uncertain what was being carried out in its name, members should let the University Secretary know of their concerns.
- (e) The Council should at its June meeting see the feedback that had been received by the working party.
- (f) The working party had not separately considered the Senate, but it was likely that the emphasis there would be on process.

THE COUNCIL RESOLVED to:

- (i) receive and note the documents laid before it;
- (ii) ask the University Secretary to send the revised working party report to Council members, prior to sending it out for internal consultation, so that members could indicate their agreement or disagreement, together with any suggestions for change.