

GAP/2008/0616

THE UNIVERSITY OF LANCASTER

Minutes of a meeting of the Council
held on 2 May 2008

PRESENT: Mr B. M. Gray (in the chair), Vice-Chancellor, Dr L. J. Banton, Ms H. Child, Mr A. Dick, Ms G. Gardner, Mr J. Hadfield, Professor G. Johnes, Mr G. Johnson, Councillor G. Marsland, Mr G. Middlebrook, Mr M. Payne, Mr T. Roca, Professor A. Siewierska, Professor D. B. Smith, Professor H. Thomason, Mr R. Turner, Ms L. Willis.

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, Professor M. M. Smyth, Ms V. Tyrrell.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Mr A. McCarthy, Professor K. J. Stringer.

CO.08/33 Welcome to new members

The Chair of the Council welcomed Lois Willis and Helen Child as newly appointed lay members of the Council.

CO.08/34 Declaration of interests

No Council members declared any interests in the agenda items for the current meeting.

CO.08/35 Presentation: Dean, Science and Technology

Document: GAP/2008/0420

The Dean of the Faculty of Science and Technology, Professor Mary Smyth, gave a presentation on the current strategic position of the Faculty. She reminded Council that the Faculty had been established in 2005, bringing together under one banner a diverse range of subject areas that had previously been spread across several separate faculties.

The constituent subjects were Biological Sciences, Environmental Science and Geography (which were to be brought together within a reconstituted Lancaster Environment Centre), Communications Systems and Computing, which had strong links with InfoLab21, and Engineering, Mathematics & Statistics, Physics and Psychology. Distinctive features of the Faculty included a relatively large proportion of research and technical support staff compared with the rests of the University, the major contribution it made to the University total research grant income, and the current predominance of undergraduate students.

She identified the following overarching strategic aims for the Faculty:

- sustaining undergraduate recruitment whilst also improving entry grades;
- increasing the proportion of postgraduate students;
- maintaining research excellence and diversifying research income,

In this context she drew attention to the following associated issues and questions:

Sustaining undergraduate recruitment whilst also improving entry grades

One option being considered was to raise required undergraduate entry grades. Although there were risks associated with this approach if application numbers were to fall as a result (and a danger that it might disproportionately affect particular student groups), A-level offers were often seen as an important indicator of quality by applicants. The Faculty would therefore carry out a careful analysis of the position of individual departments, drawing on available contextual and comparative data, and would look to raise asking grades wherever this appeared to be a realistic option.

Increasing the proportion of postgraduate students

A key aim was to find ways of ensuring that the provision of postgraduate course provision in the Faculty was demand-led whilst still being linked to staff research strengths and expertise. Experience gained over the past few years had suggested that developing courses in areas where there was known to be a national skills shortage did not of itself guarantee the generation of student interest, and it was important to find effective means of communicating the career opportunities associated with individual courses. An approach that had proved effective was to target postgraduate courses at people already working in relevant industries, and to provide modes of course delivery that were compatible with students continuing to work for the duration of their studies.

Maintaining research excellence and diversifying research income

Because of changes in government policy, it would be important for the Faculty to increase its interaction with industry and to attract additional business-related research funding, whilst continuing to engage in high quality basic research. To achieve this aim, the Dean believed that the Faculty would need to find ways of reducing the time lag between the point at which original research took place, and the eventual commercial exploitation of any opportunities created. It also would be important to identify niche areas of expertise in the Faculty where there were real possibilities for technological developments arising out of basic research that could be commercially exploited. In this context, the Faculty would need to consider whether it should aim to appoint more researchers who were explicitly interested in the potential technological applications of their areas of interest.

In response to questions from Council members, the Dean stated:

- (a) the Faculty was still in the process of establishing the new re-constituted Lancaster Environment Centre, but had already found the process of agreeing transitional arrangements very useful in helping identify areas for future constructive collaboration;
- (b) the need to communicate more clearly the career opportunities that could arise from postgraduate study in science-related subjects was a sector wide issue;
- (c) the Faculty recognised that Engineering and Physics at Lancaster were comparatively small units in the sector context, but believed that this helped them to have a distinctive identities and strengths: it was therefore important that any future growth should not be at the expense of quality.

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

CO.08/36 Minutes: report of meeting on 14 March 2008

Document: GAP/2008/0421

THE COUNCIL RESOLVED to approve the minutes as set out

CO.08/37 Rolling schedule of business

Document: GAP/2008/0422

THE COUNCIL RESOLVED to note the rolling schedule of business.

CO.08/38 Vice-Chancellor's report

Document: VC/08/R044

The Vice-Chancellor drew attention to his written report and highlighted the following points:

- (a) as had already been notified to Council members in a letter from the Vice-Chancellor, various actions were being taken in response to issues that had arisen concerning the sustainability of some activities in the Department of Continuing Education;
- (b) the recent Ideas Festival had seen a series of excellent presentations from recently appointed professors on their areas of research, but consideration needed to be given to finding ways of encouraging attendance by a greater range of people;
- (c) the Vice-Chancellor had been part of a small UUK delegation visiting India, as a follow-up to the Prime Minister's visit in January;
- (d) discussions were continuing about the possible Science Park development and associated traffic issues and it was hoped that a fuller report on this subject could be brought to the next Council meeting;
- (e) national discussions concerning the creation of more city academies continued to emphasise the potential role of universities as sponsors;
- (f) a recent government report had proposed the development of new centres of higher education, some of which could be in NW England, but it should be noted that any centres of this kind would not have the status of independent universities.

He was also pleased to report that Lancaster had performed very strongly in the most recent Independent and Guardian newspaper league tables.

THE COUNCIL RESOLVED to receive the report.

CO.08/39 LUSU President's report

Document: GAP/2008/0424

The LUSU President, Mr Tim Roca, drew attention to his written report and drew attention to the following points:

- (a) a quorate meeting of the Union Council had approved the revised LUSU constitution (which would now be brought to Senate and Council for approval);
- (b) the recent Court seminar on H.E. funding issues had been very successful, and he expressed his thanks to the Vice-Chancellor and the University for making this event possible;

- (c) he was to discuss the situation in the Department of Continuing Education with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor.

THE COUNCIL RESOLVED to receive the report.

CO.08/40 Finance

Documents: FO/08/46 and Appendix 1; FO/08/039 (previously circulated)

(A) **REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND RESOURCES**

The Director drew attention to his written report and the following points:

- (a) the University was currently pursuing some issues concerning the reduction made to the University's HEFCE T grant with respect to ELQ students: it was hoped to quantify the possible improvements that could result, but no formal decision would be made by HEFCE until July;
- (b) the University was close to reaching agreement with HMRC on a dispute concerning the calculation of VAT refunds arising from areas of university activity which qualified for partial VAT exemption;
- (c) he reminded the meeting that the June Council was discuss some major issues, including the proposed Phase 5 residences project.

The following points were made by the Director, and others, in response to questions from Council members:

- (i) the Government's decision to withdraw T funding for the majority of students taking equivalent or lower qualifications (ELQ) impacted most heavily on the Department of Continuing Education, but also affected other areas of the University, including CETAD, ICT Focus and the Management Development Division: in this respect it was noted that the Government was highly unlikely to reverse its decision;
- (ii) the current review of activities in DCE had not yet reached any definite conclusions on staffing issues, but expected to be in a position to report to UMAG in about two months time, at which point there would also be greater certainty on amount of monies lost to the University as a result of the new ELQ policy.

(B) MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS AS AT 29 FEBRUARY 2008

The Director drew attention to the most recent Management Accounts, which had been circulated to Council members, and reported that they continued to be in line with the latest outturn projections.

THE COUNCIL RESOLVED to receive the Director's report.

CO.08/41 Human Resources Report

Document: VC/08/040

The Council received a report from the University Secretary and Director of Human Resources on current HR issues and noted:

- (a) UCU had for the moment withdrawn from discussion with the University regarding the proposed new employment policies on the grounds that announcements made about the future of some activities in DCE demonstrated that the University's management was not acting in good faith (an assertion that was strongly disputed);
- (b) information was still awaited from UCEA on the new national pay negotiating framework, following UCU's rejection of the originally negotiated agreement (which all the other unions involved had accepted);

In response to a question from the Council member, the Vice-Chancellor stated that there was a very real prospect that some universities would choose to leave the national pay bargaining framework if they were not satisfied with the final proposed arrangements put forward by UCEA.

THE COUNCIL RESOLVED to receive the report.

CO.08/42 Governance: Proposed new Knowledge Exchange and Commercial Affairs Committee

Document: VC/08/R032

The Director of Research and Enterprise Services presented a proposal to establish a new Knowledge Exchange and Commercial Affairs Committee and drew attention to the following points:

- (a) the increasing importance of knowledge exchange activities for the University (which had been highlighted in the presentation from the Dean of the Faculty of Science and Technology) and their impact on the University's QR grant;

- (b) the priority given to promoting these types of activities in government policy, and the opportunities and risks this presented for the University;
- (c) the need for the University to take a strategic oversight of the issues arising.

THE COUNCIL RESOLVED to establish the new committee with the remit and membership as set out.

CO.08/43 International Strategy

Document: GAP/2008/0418

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor Bob McKinlay, drew attention to a document setting out a framework for the University's international policy that had been approved by the Senate, and explained that it sought to provide an overall focus for the University's aims and objectives in this area, whilst recognising the wide diversity of activities that fell under the international banner.

In response to questions from Council members, he explained:

- (a) that each academic faculty would be asked to propose a designated person (usually an associate dean or someone of equal standing) to be actively involved at an institutional level in the formulation and development of the University's international policy;
- (b) the International Strategy Group (chaired by the Vice-Chancellor or Deputy Vice-Chancellor) would be responsible, with UMAG, for overseeing the implementation of the policy;
- (c) the effectiveness of the agreed policy framework would be reviewed as a matter of course when the University's overall strategic plan was reviewed.

THE COUNCIL RESOLVED to receive and note the new framework.

CO.08/44 Report and recommendations from the Nominations Committee

Document: VC/08/R035

The report and recommendations of the Nominations Committee were before the Council.

THE COUNCIL RESOLVED:

- (i) to appoint Ms Gill Gardner as a member of the Audit Committee from 1 May 2008 to 28 February 2011;

- (ii) to extend the appointment of Professor Harry Thomason as a member of the Audit Committee for one month to 28 February 2011.

CO.08/45 Risk Register

Document: FO/08/48

The Director of Finance and Resources introduced the latest version of the University's Risk Register, and drew attention to following changes to the risks listed:

- (a) the risk relating to grant funding had been split between revenue and capital grants, in recognition of their different risks profiles and to allow for greater clarity in the identification of the risks involved;
- (b) a new risk had been added relating to part-time course provision and the University's regional reputation, in the light of current discussions about future activities in DCE;
- (c) there had been a reduction to the level of risk shown for wrongly identifying areas for future investment, following the general agreement that had been evident on investment priorities at a recent special meeting of the Academic Planning Committee.

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

CO.08/46 Key Performance Indicators

Documents: GAP/2008/0435; GAP/2008/0425; GAP/2008/0426

- (A) **BALANCED SCORECARD**
- (B) **THEMATIC REPORT ON RESEARCH**

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research drew particular attention to the following points with regard to the thematic report on research:

- (a) the importance of having effective support structures for postgraduate research students and the approval by Senate of an extensive range of measures designed to improve the University's PhD submission rates and ensure the quality of the support provided;
- (b) the need to ensure that completion rates, and the research environment for PhD students, met the requirements set by research councils for the award of studentships;

- (c) the University had made a number of bids to the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council for funding to support possible new doctoral training centres;
- (d) because data on citation rates for research publications would play a major role in the future use of research metrics, the University was taking steps to ensure it had a comprehensive record of staff research outputs which would be continuously updated, and had also volunteered to take part in a HEFCE pilot project on the use of citations data;
- (e) given the increased significance of the level of research income from UK industry, commerce and public corporations in determining the HEFCE QR grant, an additional indicator would be added to the balanced score card showing Lancaster's performance in this area.

THE COUNCIL RESOLVED to receive the balanced scorecard and thematic report on research.

CO.08/47 Naming of Campuses: Blackpool and Blackburn

Document: VC/08/R037

The University Secretary reported that it had been agreed to permit Blackburn College and Blackpool and The Fylde College to describe their H.E. campuses as being 'in association with Lancaster University', for the reasons set out in the document before the Council.

THE COUNCIL RESOLVED to note the report.

CO.08/48 Senate: report of meeting on 20 February 2008

Document: GAP/2008/0436

THE COUNCIL RESOLVED to received the report of the meeting of the Senate on 20 February 2008.

CO.08/49 Review of current meeting

New members commented favourably on the induction programme that they had attended prior to the Council meeting and the clarity of the Council papers.