



# Buckinghamshire New University

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## Missenden Council

### Minutes

date: **10 June 2014**  
time: **3.30 pm**  
location: **Carrington Room, Missenden Abbey**

#### Present:

Christine Beasley (Chair)	Independent Council member
Antony Bellekom	Independent Council member
Baljit Dhillon	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
Maggie James	Independent Council member
Tim Marshall	Co-opted Council member
Sukhie Mattu	Elected Professional Services Employee
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
Brian Tranter (Deputy Chair)	Independent Council member

#### Officers:

Ellie Smith	Clerk to the Council
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#### In attendance:

Derek Godfrey	Deputy Vice Chancellor
Ian Plover	Director of Faculty, DMM
Shân Wareing	PVC Learning & Teaching
Alison Chambers	Pro Vice Chancellor/Executive Dean, S&H
John Cooper	Director of Finance
Steve Dewhurst	Director of Business Planning
Matt Gilbert	Vice President, Student Involvement, Students' Union

#### Apologies:

Antonia Byatt	Independent Council member
Lori Flynn	Independent Council member
Vanessa Pilon	Registrar (Governance)

**936 Welcome**

936.1 The Chair welcomed Matt Gilbert, President elect of the Students' Union, to contribute to the debate.

**937 Declaration of potential conflicts of interest**

937.1 None were received.

**Part 1: 2014-15, Recruitment**

938 It was explained that at Bucks, whilst student applications this year looked healthy compared with the sector, when broken down by course this was not the case for all the University's provision. Numbers were healthy in some subject areas but in others conversions rates in comparison with previous years were low. Successful areas included Nursing, Society & Health HEFCE courses, International, provision in Slough and niche partnership delivery. It was anticipated that there may be a shortfall of 100-120 FTUG numbers in September 2014.

**939 Student Recruitment: Facts, Figures and Observations**

Attention was drawn to the current comparisons for Bucks, the Sector and the University's direct competitors, through the following:

- Applications overall
- Applications through subsidiary companies and international
- HEFCE/Nursing and across subject areas
- Subject areas under/over recruiting
- SNC for 2013-14 and 2014-15
- Comparisons for 2013-14 and 2014-15
- Student age profiles
- Regional vs national recruitment

Observations were made regarding the main recruiting areas both regionally and nationally. Some recruitment profile changes were identified, particularly in the area of Psychology, where recruitment of mature students had increased by 16%.

It was concluded that changes to delivery, targeted marketing and delivery at a sub-regional level as well as recruitment through Clearing, in year recruitment, partnerships and International/EU can reduce the impact that lower HEFCE recruitment will have on income.

**940 Impact on financial forecast**

This was shown graphically in relation to both a high and low target range and the debt covenant based on current levels of student acceptances. It clearly showed that whilst the current estimated recruitment of full-time undergraduate for entry in 2014 was not at the expected or desired level the University remained in budget and above the debt covenant. It was stressed that what matters in terms of finance is healthy recruitment year on year after 2014.

**941 Clearing Activities and Plans to Close the Gap for 2014 entry**

Plans and support that has been put in place were fully explained. This included:

- External consultancy support
- Recruitment teams focused on late recruitment with advertising both in social media and through clearing
- Conversion activities involving telemarketing, follow-up phone calls, hoodies, applicant newsletters and social media
- The "Big Deal just got bigger" package which launches on the open day on 18 June 2014
- What potential students say about the University in relation to support

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

A number of points were made by members that provoked thought and debate to which the University representatives responded. This included:

- The ability of students to trade-up and be released from their first offer does not have a major impact on Bucks' numbers
- The University is working hard to improve conversion and achieve their student number control (SNC); however, we are working to the assumption of being 100-120 below the SNC in 2014-15 for budgetary forecasting.
- The need to identify those areas which are able to expand and recruit, and limit those that are declining
- Target major areas for development in 2015 – for example, the re-designed computing programmes have already been launched and are showing improvement in recruitment
- Increasing the numbers of regional colleges invited to Bucks for taster days or progression arrangements as well as reaching out to target markets
- Although this is only just being marketed through open days and to existing students it is anticipated that the improved/extended Big Deal will become an increasingly attractive and unique selling point to potential students
- The need to identify why conversion is so varied as well as the underlying causes of lower conversion rates
- In relation to Nursing it was noted that there had been an increase in the number of tariff points required to give an offer and this translated into a higher level of rejections but ensured that offers were made to potential students with more ability to succeed
- It was thought that courses offering professional body accreditation were becoming more attractive, however, the challenge was finding the appropriate accreditation to offer with each course.
- Recruitment to postgraduate professional courses has improved but part time recruitment is declining except where study can be undertaken locally and alongside employment; the latter is consistent with the national picture.
- Need to be clearer about how marketing takes place and how this translates into acceptances – through both a universal and a subject based approach including how academic staff support the recruitment process
- Identify why students enrol with the University by undertaking an enrolment survey and ensuring a high level of responses through focus groups and phone calls

**Part 2: Removal of SNC and recruitment for 2015-16 onwards**

943 This debate was identified as an opportunity for Council to contribute to the development of a strategy to plan for the changing context of recruitment as a result of the removal of the HEFCE student number control (SNC) from September 2015. As a result of the high grades policy i.e. applicants with high grades being outside the SNC, there is already a redistribution of students across the sector with some Russell Group Universities expanding rapidly which is having a knock on effect for universities across the sector. This may be accompanied by a decreasing quality of student experience in those universities which have expanded rapidly but Bucks must be pro-active in marketing, maintain their quality and continue to do what we do best to remain a successful player.

944 The University was described as having a clear sense of purpose, being: professional, practiced based and relevant to industry with aspirations to excellence, playing to strengths as well as actively reaching for goals. The work undertaken to develop the educational character of the University was clearly detailed through, for example, work-ready students, enterprise, knowledge exchange and innovation. Attention was drawn to recent government developments including the removal of the student number control in 2015 as well as higher education cold spots, and the 'earning while learning' and higher level apprenticeships proposals.

945 **Mitigation to be applied**

945.1 Recent Government developments which include the removal of the SNC for 2015 also include goals which fit with the Bucks ethos. These are the parity of esteem for both academic and vocational routes as well as earning while learning and higher level apprenticeships.

945.2 Plans to improve recruitment in both traditional and non-traditional areas include:

- Bucks in Slough – adding to the already successful recruitment of local people studying intensively and looking to identify permanent University teaching accommodation in Slough
- Improving European and International recruitment – now achieving rapid growth of international recruitment and targeting European recruitment with increased targets set for both undergraduate and postgraduate numbers
- Developing our academic portfolio and building upon our strengths across the University through interdisciplinary, cross faculty and the creation of new portfolios
- Centre of excellence in Sport Exercise & Well Being – this will be developed to fill a gap in the market and provide additional portfolios, focused on student experience, employability, enterprise, work-based and research informed teaching & learning
- Course portfolio development in DMM – based on the brand of offering ‘a creative university’ experience, courses with high potential, partner colleges, two year degrees and flexible delivery

945.3 Plans for a new marketing approach includes:

- Shared institutional responsibility to engage with marketing to match the best in the sector from senior managers to subject leaders and other multi-disciplinary teams
- Through building and maintaining personal contacts, collaborations across the University, refocusing the offer to match what the market wants and developing strong narratives to tempt students to study our courses

#### **946 Plenary discussion/reactions from members on the approach**

946.1 Clarification was sought and suggestions made as follows:

- Development of a future trend analysis
- Market intelligence to identify skills gaps and identification of where higher level skills may be required in the workforce. The Vice Chancellor’s involvement with the Buckinghamshire Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) ensures the University is kept abreast of this information
- Identify key ways of drawing down alternative Government funding
- Consider what the net loss to the University of not taking action would be
- Develop a clear prioritised range of activities and plans for their implementation
- Two year courses, flexibly delivered, may provide a real opportunity and should be implemented urgently
- Cyber security with certification would be a major growth area
- Develop more partnerships with business, building on the successful UCFB model/brand
- Increase and improve progression arrangements from colleges
- Talk to employees about going into their local schools
- Identify distinctiveness, personal added value
- FD Social Care could provide a great opportunity if flexibly delivered to work-based students
- Hoodies are great but how about canvas bags for supermarkets
- A great array of ideas are being brought forward and Council need assurance that action is being taken urgently with an early degree of success

946.2 It was reported that the University is currently consolidating ideas with some already being progressed. Council considered that they required a broad action plan, assessed risks and a view on the likelihood of success of suggested initiatives and that this be presented as key priorities with evidence to demonstrate delivery. Plans must be sustainable, built on a fully developed marketing plan which is disseminated internally and involves all staff to promote enthusiasm and buy-in to the future success of the University.

**947 Date of next meeting**

947.1 The next meeting of Council is scheduled to take place on Monday 7 July 2014, commencing at 4.00 pm at Missenden Abbey, followed by a formal Council dinner at 7.00 pm.

The meeting started at 3.30 pm and finished at 6.10 pm.

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

Prepared by: Registrar (Governance) – 11 June 2014  
Checked by: Clerk to the Council – 19 June 2014  
Confirmed by: Vice Chancellor – 23 June 2014  
Confirmed by: The Chair – 29 June 2014