

Faculty Executive Board
Minutes of Meeting held on 13 April 2011

Present: Mr John Cocking (JAC), Professor Phil Wright (PCW), Professor John David (JPD), Professor Mike Hounslow (MJH), Miss Jenny Miller (JM), Professor Rob Dwyer-Joyce (RDJ), Professor Allan Matthews (AM), Professor Geraint Jewell (GWJ), Dr Andrea Bath (AB), Mrs Janis Webster (JW), Professor John Derrick (JD), Professor Harm Askes (HA).

In attendance – Mrs Louise Cowling.

Opening

1. Apologies

Dr Malcolm Butler (MAB), Professor Sheila MacNeil (SM), Professor Visakan Kadirkamanathan (VK), Dr Stephen Beck (SB).

2. Minutes of FEB meetings held on 9th March 2011 & 23rd March 2011

The minutes were approved.

3. Matters arising/Outstanding actions

New Buildings

MJH reported that the capital cases for the two new buildings have been approved and the funds have been released. Engineering is considered the priority for the current capital pipeline. The Faculty's estate is substandard in a number of areas but the Faculty has the greatest potential for market growth. It is therefore in the interest of the wider University to see the Engineering estates needs met.

Actions

The Board considered and reported on all outstanding actions.

With regard to Action 23, it was reported that this year the manual timetabling system will be used, however, a trial will be run which uses the manual system alongside the electronic version and the two will be compared. This will involve interaction between departmental timetablers and CICS. The work will require several days of staff time but the Board felt that the work is worthwhile and should be tested.

4. FPVC Report and UEB Feedback

Cross-cutting Pro Vice Chancellors

Each of the crosscutting Pro Vice Chancellors has given planning presentations to UEB.

The following Learning and Teaching priorities were identified:

- Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR).
- Reflection of the value of semesterisation – MJH reported that he has a preference for three equal semesters. Departments should elicit views on the subject, as the thinking behind any change should feed bottom up.
- Learning Hub – a physical and virtual gathering of learning support (eg MASH) though the physical home is not likely to support delivery too.
- Breadth – Reflections on the breadth of the university education we aim to achieve. It has been suggested that the University teaches specialisations too soon which does not fit students when they arrive or when they leave. This can only be resolved by a top down steer.

The following Research & Innovation priorities were identified:

- Diversification of funding and understanding the RCUK approach.
- REF

The following International priorities were identified:

- Internationalisation has to have a purpose and be intertwined within research and learning and teaching, rather than being a 'third leg'. Performance in this area has to be challenged by building partnerships with other institutions and by having an internationalised curriculum so that our graduates are fit to be graduates anywhere in the world. It was noted that the rest of Europe should be seen to be international as it is a good source of funding.

Professional Services Restructure

Claire Baines' post of Academic Secretary will not be refilled. Instead a restructuring process will take place that will see LeTs join Student Services. There will be a Director level appointment within LeTs and a Planning Director will be appointed within Planning and Governance Services to provide leadership.

Civic University

The Vice Chancellor has expressed a desire to see the University identify and project its civic role within the region. The message that Sheffield is a world-class university in the local area should be communicated at every opportunity and we should ensure that it is understood that the success of the University is good for the locality.

Project 2012

Project 2012 has now concluded because the tuition fee levels have been set. A concerted set of marketing activities will begin to communicate the benefits of a University education.

It is possible that the government/HEFCE may seek to mitigate the high level of fees by cutting quota by around 10% then auctioning the places back to universities. The University will have to consider what types of bid it might make and the bases of any bid. The Faculty should consider what it would like to do more of.

The Board discussed the possibility of industry-sponsored courses, whereby a business or a number of businesses sponsor whole cohorts. The companies would then be well placed to employ the students after completion of their studies.

Journal subscriptions

Wiley-Blackwell and Elsevier have been increasing the annual subscription cost to universities by around 15% per year.

Access agreement

The final Access Agreement report has gone to UEB. All of the widening participation targets bar one have been met (participation from lower socio-economic classes). More money will be invested to remedy this particular target and also maintain the position of the others as it is anticipated that it may become more difficult to sustain these levels.

Prior Year Adjustments (PYAs)

The Faculty is forecasting a large PYA this year. There is some concern at University level that if all the PYA is spent in the year it becomes available then it will lead to a deficit the following year. HoDs were encouraged to view PYAs as more recurrent in nature and plan for sustainable long-term expenditure rather than seeing PYAs as a one off sum of money to be spent on one off projects. Discussions will take place between departments and the Faculty finance team to plan how this money will be invested in a steady, sustained way to further grow income. A paper will then be presented at the next formal FEB meeting that will outline how each department will spend its PYA.

It was also noted that better recognition should be given to centrally derived costs in the Faculty Resource Allocation Process. No step changes in methodology were foreseen. A paper will be brought to the next formal FEB meeting that outlines the methodology of the Faculty Resource Allocation.

Retirement

HR is currently working on advice to fit in with the new rules on retirement. It may require a more flexible approach if some staff choose not to retire at the 'normal retirement age'. It is important that staff do not take the view that because they are approaching retirement age they are able to wind down their level of activity. As with all staff, the SRDS process will be extremely useful in ensuring that staff continue to perform at the required level and that any issues are dealt with in the normal manner. Staff who reach retirement age and continue to perform well will be able to continue in their role.

Staff recruitment issues

The problem of the 'two body issue' was discussed at UEB. This involves the appointment of an academic to the University who has a partner who is embedded in the same university. In order to appoint one of them the University has also been asked to consider appointing his/her partner. This has also occurred in other faculties. PCW has had discussions regarding how the situation is dealt with in the United States, where it is often built into the HR process.

REF

The REF marketplace seems to have started. Good staff need to be retained. SRDS will be an opportunity to highlight strong performance with staff. Care should be taken not to disappoint strong performers inadvertently.

Also see UEB minutes <http://www.shef.ac.uk/ueb/minutes.html>

5. Report from FDR&I

Research and Innovations Opportunities Manager

Graham Sykes the Faculty's Research and Innovations Opportunities Manager (RIOM) will be leaving his post supporting Engineering. He will be replaced by Heather Sugden (4 days a week) and Faye Robinson (1 day a week). It is anticipated that one of them will join FEB.

Head of Research Development Section

Dr Tracy Swift, Head of Research Development Section has left the University to take up a position in Australia. Her vacant position is now being advertised.

Contracts and Agreements Manager

Kathryn Hall, the Faculty's Contracts and Agreements Manager will be returning to post after a period of maternity leave. Stephanie Smalley has been covering her position during her absence.

Full Economic Cost

EPSRC are changing the FEC rate. This will affect Sheffield less than some other institutions but there will be a push down on some EPSRC overheads. There will also be a separate process for equipment above £10k. GWJ will distribute further details so that the Board can feed in comments before a paper goes to UEB.

EPSRC Capability Document

A second version of the EPSRC Capability Document will shortly be produced. Following feedback, the revised version will contain a more considered view.

EPSRC Delivery Plan

Work on an EPSRC delivery plan will begin shortly. GWJ will communicate more details as they become available.

Commercialisation Manager

Dr Stephen Pyke has taken up post as Commercialisation Manager and will be engaging with staff around the Faculty.

MyPublications

The MyPublications system has seen little update within departments. HoDs should encourage their staff to make use of the system in order to improve uptake.

6. Report from FDL&T

Management Courses

The importance of departmental input into the content of management courses was highlighted. The commitment from both sides has been written down and so accountability should not be an issue.

7. Report from FDO

Engineering Estates User Design Groups

The Engineering Estates User Design Groups have now held their first meetings.

Additional Space

The Faculty has been allocated the TILL and MLTC space in the Portobello Building and have secured outline agreement from ECSG for various other spaces. Approximately £2.1m has also been secured for refurbishment, but each relocation project must be costed and submitted to ECSG for approval..

For Decision

8. Proposal for PhD Teaching Assistant scheme

The Board received a proposal for a scheme that aimed to use appropriate PhD students to deliver aspects of learning and teaching within the Faculty. The scheme would increase the PhD period for participating students by one year and would allow them to obtain a PG Certificate in Learning and Teaching. The cost saved from the Demonstrator fee would pay the PG certificate fee as well as a large proportion of the additional year's stipend. Students would benefit from greater teaching experience. The institution would benefit by having an enhanced quality of teaching for undergraduate students over and above the normal Demonstrator role and by relieving some academic staff of some of their teaching responsibilities. Students would be nominated from Departments

It was also proposed that a complementary cohort of students also participate in the PG Certificate in learning and teaching alongside their PhD but without mitigating the cost against demonstrating. This could be used by students who would like to obtain the PG Certificate for career progression. Any demonstrating under this route would be paid for in the normal manner.

The paper outlined the proposed training for students along with the associated costs. The greater the number of students participating in the scheme the smaller the training cost to the Faculty.

The Board were supportive of the proposal to ensure that students should be both well trained and supported when carrying out teaching duties. There was however a question over how much the proposed scheme would replace existing demonstrating. If the scheme simply replaces this then the perceived savings in terms of cost and staff time were not realistic. There was also some concern regarding HR implications as the paper implies that the students are 'working' rather than receiving a bursary. There could also be issues relating to tax. The Board also questioned the reasoning behind an automatic extension of a studentship to four years without the additional fee income. There was some worry that if demonstrating is being carried out by a smaller number of students taking a bigger load then it may be difficult to get students with specialisation in a large number of areas.

The Board were keen to emphasise that the demonstrating aspect of the scheme should not be seen as a way of simply extending the PhD process and nor should the completion of teaching duties be seen as justification for automatic completion of the PhD programme.

The Board agreed that the proposal should be returned to Learning & Teaching Committee for revision (including proper engagement with departments) based on the Boards comments.

9. Global Engineering Challenge

A proposal was put forward which sought to use one of the weeks previously occupied by the January examination period for a Global Engineering Challenge for students in the Faculty. The project would be similar to the Engineering Without Borders Challenge project but would be modified to the Faculty's time-scale. Students would work in mixed teams with students from various departments and would be required to use a variety of skills, reflecting professional practice. The Board felt that the estimates on staff time required for the implementation were too low and that they should be revised to a more realistic level. The scheme was considered to be good value for money and a good thing to do for the students. It was noted that there would be no formal assessment involved but that students had to participate in order to complete the module and that this should be reflected in the Regulations eg 60% attendance required to pass

The Board questioned whether the course was academically ambitious enough. Each student should be able to act as an expert in his or her particular area. Each of the projects should be scrutinised to ensure that they allow each of the students the potential to do this.

The Board were supportive of the scheme.

10. Review of CSC scholarships

The Board received a review of the CSC scholarship scheme. It was noted that as a stand-alone scheme it is somewhat burdensome and produces small quantities of students.. It is also an inefficient use of resource as it operates on a separate model to other scholarship schemes. However it was considered that the engagement with the Chinese institutions is of great importance and the continuation of the scheme might be worthwhile so that the relationships with these institutions can be maintained. Greater effort in engaging with the institutions should be made including visits to each.

The Board agreed the following two points:

- The CSC scholarship process should be mainstreamed to make it fit better with the normal scholarship process. This will reduce the effort involved and make the scheme more worthwhile.
- A Chinese engagement scheme should be devised to plan a structured approach as to how we work with each of the Chinese institutions.

The lead should be taken by the PVC International.

11. A Faculty scheme for EPSRC project studentships

Item closed – commercially sensitive.

For Discussion

12. Strategy for Learning and Teaching, 2011-2016

The Board considered the Strategy for Learning and Teaching, which had already been discussed at Learning and Teaching Committee. The Board made the following comments:

- JD was uncomfortable with the requirement that 20-credits must be taught outside the department at levels 1 and 2, rather it should be an opportunity rather than a requirement.
- Discussion regarding centralised timetabling for all rooms has again arisen. Whilst the Board understood the logic of revisiting this issue in order to make full use of available space, it was acknowledged that departmental meeting rooms should be kept under departmental control.
- Mainstreaming CPD betrays the nature of some short courses that don't fit this model and there is a need to be mindful of this. Those courses that can be credit accumulating should be, for those that cannot this must be recognised.
- There is no mention of facilities in the objectives, e.g. invest in... put in place...

The final response is due to be submitted on 6th May 2011. Any further comments should be submitted to Andrea Bath who will collate views and pass to MJH for sign off before the response is submitted.

13. List of 'out of contract' staff

The circumstances surrounding the member of staff from COM are to be investigated. The MSE case has been resolved.

14. Establishment of a VPHI

The Board received a paper outlining plans for the creation of a Virtual Physiological Human Institute (VPHI). The Institute will be formed in partnership with the Faculty of Medicine and Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. This is a considerable opportunity for the Faculty that will allow engagement with the other partners right through to the clinic. It will allow the Faculty to exploit technological advances it makes. An outline statement of what each partner will contribute has been created and the Vice Chancellor has agreed to cover the one-off startup costs. The Faculty will also bid for HEIF money to pay for a clinical engagement position. The Faculty too will be required to provide funding for the project to the value of £97k over two years. It was proposed that this be funded from the Faculty Strategic Fund. The Board agreed to the request for funding.

It is anticipated that the VPHI will be housed in the Engineering Graduate School.

For Information Only

15. PGR student intake in the Faculty of Engineering

Paper for information only.

16. Proposal for a Cross Faculty Mentoring Scheme

Paper for information only.

17. Income and Expenditure Financial Reports

Paper for information only.

18. Research Net Contribution and Research Income

Paper for information only.

19. A.O.B

Graham Sykes

The Board conveyed their gratitude to Graham Sykes for the work he has done for the Faculty. He has made significant progress in what has often been a difficult environment.