

Ruskin College

GOVERNING EXECUTIVE

**Minutes of the five hundred and fifty-second meeting of the
Governing Executive held on Friday 3 July 2009
at Ruskin College, Oxford**

Present: David Norman (Chair), Carole Orgell-Rosen, Pearl Ryall, Helen Kidd, Sue Ledwith, Audrey Mullender, Jane Dixon, Liz Mathews, Jo Morris, John Fray, Chris Baugh, Ruth Hunt (part)

In attendance: Sally Courtney, Chris Wilkes, Kieron Winters, Rebecca Cox (minutes)

PART A

- 1 **Apologies for absence** Action
Apologies were received from, Pam Johnson, Carol Newbury, and Ruth Hunt for late arrival.

- 2 **Absent**
Mike Bradley, Jan Etienne, Doug Nicholls, Pamela Roberts, Fiona Sloman and Andrea Berryman were absent without apologies.

- 3 **Chair's introduction**
Noted: that yesterday the Chair had received three resolutions carried at the UCU meeting on 30 June, which related to staffing, health and safety issues and the Capital Project. The Chair stated, as he had at a number of meetings this year, that matters regarding relations between management and employees that could not be resolved through the normal committee structure should be taken to the JNC. Governing Executive members were elected from Council as individuals, not delegates of their organisations, and had a legal duty to act in the best interests of the College. The Chair ruled that it was not proper for any organisation to send a resolution to the Governing Executive and that it was not appropriate for the resolutions to be discussed at the meeting, although the issues related to the Capital Project could be raised under item 4. This ruling was challenged, but then upheld by a vote.
Agreed: that the Chair should write to the Secretary of the UCU explaining the constitution of the College and a Governing Executive training session on protocol would be organised in the autumn. DN
Clerk

- 4 **Minutes**
Confirmed: as a correct record the minutes of Part A of the Governing Executive meeting held on 8 May 2009.

- 5 **Matters arising**
Noted: that concerns were raised that, although it was stated in the previous minutes that the College was not losing any staff to redundancies, there were a number of roles that were currently not filled. The Principal clarified the position with regard to the roles of Dean and the Academic Co-ordinators, and confirmed that these matters were currently being dealt with appropriately by the internal committees of the College. The Chair reiterated that the Governing Executive's remit did not extend to discussion of staffing and job/role descriptions.

(Ruth Hunt joined the meeting at 11.20am.)

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6 Capital Project

Agreed: that items 6.1 and 6.2 should be taken together.

6.1 Noted: letter from the LSC re funding for the Capital Project.

6.2 Received: alternative funding strategy for the Capital Project.

Noted: that since the letter from Geoff Russell, Chief Executive of the LSC, had been received, it had been confirmed that Ruskin would not be awarded any funding for Phase 1 of the Capital Project. As agreed at the last meeting of the Governing Executive, the viability of a lower cost Capital Project was being demonstrated by bringing one possible model to today's meeting. This report illustrated how a reduced project could work and also covered the possibilities of borrowing from a bank or identifying a private partner to build the residential accommodation. A high priority would be the creation of more en suite rooms. The Governing Executive were not being asked to vote today to approve this particular option, but to approve that further modelling work be carried out.

Following questions and comments, the following were noted:

- that there would be adequate space in the Academic Building to accommodate a cafeteria, and it could be sited in the heart of the College where operationally it might prove more successful
- that in order to maximise income generation and meet the demands of students and those using the facilities for conferences, the residential accommodation should be of a good standard with full disabled access to some rooms
- that there was currently planning permission for a further 12 study bedrooms (without full disabled access) at Stoke House, which would expire later this year. Taking this development forward would represent very poor value for money and, as it would involve the loss of a mature beech tree, planning permission may not now be renewed
- that the figures in the report included money already spent, as it dealt with the project as a whole
- that the model for borrowing from the bank was based upon a rate of occupancy for long course students lower than this year and rental income at a level appropriate to Ruskin students, and therefore represented a realistic servicing of the debt
- that there was disappointment that the redevelopment would not be on such a large scale as originally hoped, but that the College had no choice but to move forward in whatever way possible to make it fit for purpose.

Agreed: that the management team should continue to explore the lower cost options over the summer and bring a report and recommendations outlining a viable proposal to the Governing Executive meeting on 2 October.

Agreed: that the Principal be authorised to write to staff, students and the Fellowship to update them on the Capital Project in the light of the LSC's decision.

SMT

AM

7 Finance Committee

7.1 Noted: minutes of the Finance Committee meeting held on 1 May 2009.

7.2 Noted: minutes of the Finance Committee meeting held on 18 June 2009.

7.3 Received: report on the financial position to the end of April 2009.

Noted: that the funding from the LSC would not be clawed back and had now been released into the accounts. A deficit of between £160K and £180K was forecast, largely as a result of the shortfall in student numbers which meant tuition fee income was down on budget. The importance of hitting student numbers targets next year was recognised and the situation was looking positive currently.

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- 7.4 **Noted:** report on spend on the Capital Project to date.
- 7.5 **Received:** the budget for the year to 31 July 2010.
Noted: that this report showed income, expenditure and student numbers on one page. A deficit of £123K was being forecast at the moment, although further savings had been identified over the past couple of days.
Noted: that the Finance Committee had recommended that further efforts must be made to reduce this forecast deficit.
Approved: with this caveat the budget for the year to 31 July 2010.
- 7.6 **Received:** report on performance against student numbers targets for 2008/09, and student numbers targets for 2009/10.
Noted: the General Secretary summarised this report, which illustrated where shortfalls occurred this year and highlighted any trends. Strategies had been put in place to address the issues raised, in particular for long courses. The marketing strategy and marketing mix were included in the report for background information. The targets for 2009/10 had been reflected in the budget and every effort had been made to ensure that these were realistic in order to avoid the problem with tuition fees income experienced this year. There was no mention of a media strategy in the document. The General Secretary confirmed that the College was carrying out some media campaigns and the document would be updated to reflect this. The Chair stated that Council members had indicated that they were impressed by the presentation on marketing given at the meeting last week. CW
- 8 Widening Participation Strategic Assessment and Higher Education Strategy**
- 8.1 **Received:** HE Strategy submitted to HEFCE in February 2008 and subsequent HEFCE/QAA feedback – for background information.
Noted: that this was carried out as part of a pilot and HEFCE had expressed their confidence in the College's strategic view of Higher Education. An updated version of this strategy would have to be submitted to HEFCE in the future as part of the College's application for grant funding. This would be brought to the November meeting of the Governing Executive for approval. Clerk
- 8.2 **Received:** Widening Participation Strategic Assessment submitted to HEFCE in June 2009.
Noted: that this document built on the HE Strategy, illustrating Ruskin's mission, how this was carried out, what the targets were and how these were monitored. Funding would be conditional upon the submission of this document. One member's comment that HEFCE was currently particularly interested in how the recession was adversely affecting women and how organisations were reacting to this gender inequality was noted.
- 9 Integrated quality and enhancement review**
Received: IQER report and action plan 2009.
Noted: that the report highlighted many of areas of good practice that, it was hoped, would be extended across the College. There were some minor recommendations for improvement, particularly in the area of harmonisation across the College. The General Secretary reported that this had been a very positive and useful experience. The Chair thanked all those involved for the additional work they had carried out.
- 10 Audit Committee**
- 10.1 **Received:** minutes of the Audit Committee meeting held on 6 March 2009.
- 10.2 **Received:** verbal report from the Chair of the Audit Committee on the meeting held on 19 June 2009.
Noted: that the Audit Committee would be considering a report from the internal auditors on the risks associated with the Capital Project prior to the

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key meeting of the Governing Executive on 2 October. This would be an independent assessment of the risks involved and would assist Governing Executive members in making a fully informed decision. A number of health and safety issues were considered, which would be looked at by the appropriate internal committees and monitored by the Audit Committee. Questions were raised regarding the legal position of Governing Executive members in terms of their liability, and information regarding this would be circulated with the minutes. A specific health and safety concern was raised and the Chair again advised that it would be inappropriate for the Governing Executive to discuss the matter in any detail and that this should be taken to the Principal who would ensure that a risk assessment would be carried out if necessary. Concerns were also expressed regarding the availability and implementation of the Critical Incident Policy. The Principal and the General Secretary would look at this further to ensure that the policy was accessible to all staff.

Clerk

AM/CW

11 Principal's report

Received: a report from the Principal.

Noted: that the Ruskin kitchens were 2 of only 73 catering establishments in Oxfordshire to be awarded 5 stars for food hygiene and safety in a recent report by the City Council, along with only 8 other Oxford colleges. The Chair thanked the catering staff and congratulated them on their achievement. A new CertHE in Combined Studies would be validated in November and all involved were thanked for their hard work. Questions were raised regarding the TUC Organising Academy. The Principal stated that this was wonderful news for the College and the agreement should be signed next week. This would not bring ring-fenced funding, but would lead to an increased number of full-cost courses aimed at training the organisers of the future. This further link with the trade union movement was welcomed as part of Ruskin recalibrating its mission for the modern age, and it was hoped that this would lead to wider opportunities to identify new areas of work and bring new students into the College.

12 Student representatives' report

This item was not taken, as there were no student representatives present.

Noted: that the President of the RSU gave a very impressive presentation to the Council meeting last week.

13 Charity Commission

Noted: the Charity Commission annual return 2007/08.

14 Governing Executive self-assessment

Received: self-assessment form to be completed by those Governing Executive members present at the meeting.

Noted: that in order to identify any areas where improvements could be made to Governing Executive meetings and its ability to effectively carry out its business, members were being asked to complete the self-assessment forms and hand them to the Clerk after the meeting.

15 Date of meetings for 2009/10

Noted: meeting dates for the next academic year, all at 11.00am:
2 October 2009; 27 November 2009; 5 March 2010; 7 May 2010; 2 July 2010

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 12.50pm