

Ruskin College

GOVERNING EXECUTIVE

Minutes of the five hundred and sixty-first meeting of the Governing Executive held on Friday 8 July 2011 at 11.00am at Ruskin College, Walton Street, Oxford (Raphael Samuel Hall)

Present:	In attendance:
Chris Baugh Wendy Dawson (part) Jane Dixon (part) Joel Hirsch Pam Johnson Liz Mathews Audrey Mullender Teresa Munby (part) Carole Orgell-Rosen (Chair) Pearl Ryall (part) Kieron Winters	Rebecca Cox (minutes) Sally Courtney Hilda Kean (part) Alan Shepherd Chris Wilkes

PART A

- 1 Apologies for absence** Action
 Apologies were received from Mike Bradley, Doug Nicholls, Jo Morris, John Fray, Anne Hock, Colin Taylor, Andy Erlam, Des McDermott and Jane Aldgate. Apologies were also received from David Norman, Chair of Governing Executive. Carole Orgell-Rosen, Vice-Chair, chaired the meeting in his absence.
- 2 Absent**
 There were no members absent without apologies.
- 3 Organisation of the meeting**
Agreed: that the Search Committee item would be taken first, followed by the draft budget, after which the agenda would be taken in order.
- 4 Search Committee**
- 4.1 Received:** minutes of the Search Committee meeting held on 16 June 2011.
Noted: that paragraph 2.2 of the minutes was to be deleted and the issue taken back to Search Committee to resolve.
Agreed: that Alan Shepherd could sit in on today's meeting as a non-voting observer.
Noted: that, following the resignation of Pam Johnson from the Governing Executive, the College would remain in touch with UNISON, who would be nominating a replacement member to Ruskin Council in the autumn.
- 4.2 Approved:** the election of Wendy Dawson and Colin Taylor as members of the Governing Executive with immediate effect, and the election of John Raftery who would replace Pam Johnson from November. The election of these members would be ratified at the AGM of Ruskin Council in December.

(Jane Dixon joined the meeting at 11.15am.)

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5 Declaration of interests

Noted: that no member present declared any interest, financial or otherwise, relating to any item on the agenda.

6 Finance Committee

Received: the draft budget for the year to 31 July 2012.

Noted: the Finance Director's summary of the main points. Work on the budget was ongoing, but no significant changes had been made to the draft circulated to members in advance of today's meeting. It was anticipated that the College would be forecasting a small operational loss next year. In subsequent years, following the move to a single site, it was intended that a balanced budget would be set. Student recruitment for next year was currently on course to meet the budgeted numbers. The changes in funding with regard to student tuition fees would not apply until 2012/13.

Approved: the budget for the year to 31 July 2012.

7 Minutes

Received: the minutes of Part A of the Governing Executive meeting held on 20 May 2011.

Noted: that apologies from Chris Baugh had been sent, but not received, and that the venue of the meeting should read the 'Raphael Samuel Hall'.

Confirmed: as a correct record, with these amendments, the minutes of Part A of the Governing Executive meeting held on 20 May 2011.

8 Matters arising

Noted: that a letter had been written to the Oxford Times with regard to the proposed development of Ruskin Fields. Since then, there had been a series of correspondence in both the Oxford Times and the Oxford Mail between the Principal and a small minority of local residents, in which the Principal had responded to all of the concerns raised. There had also been very balanced reports in the newspapers on the College's proposal to encourage housing development on the lower three fields, at least 50% of which would be affordable housing. If this were achieved, the College would be helping to provide homes for some of the 7000 people on the City Council's housing register, would raise money which could be used to provide bursaries and scholarships for its students in the future, and would be meeting its legal duty as a charity to maximise its assets.

Noted: that there were no further matters arising.

9 Finance Committee

9.1 **Received:** minutes of the Finance Committee meeting held on 24 June 2011.

Noted: that the College had overshot its additional targets and would be retaining the extra £109K from the Skills Funding Agency (SFA). The Chair of the Finance Committee stated that this was a great achievement in the current economic climate and that Ruskin was performing well.

(Jane Dixon left the meeting at 11.30am.)

9.2 **Received:** a report on the financial position to the end of May 2011.

Noted: that the College had overshot the tuition fee income budget by £130K. A great deal of work was being carried out on non-pay costs and it was hoped that some significant savings would be made over the next few years as a result.

9.3 **Received:** the commentary on the Financial Plan.

Noted: that the College's three-year Financial Plan was due to be submitted to the

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SFA before the end of July. The commentary had been brought to the meeting, but the figures could not be shown as the template had yet to be issued. During this period, the College would initially be working towards a break-even position and, later, a surplus position. A discussion on residence and catering followed. It was noted that, following the move to Headington, the College catering would be working out of one kitchen and would be changing from a refectory style to a cafeteria, which would be open all day serving meals, snacks and drinks. Therefore, a very different business plan would be required. Work was currently being carried out to develop this, determining how those staff who were choosing to remain with the College following the move would be deployed. Discussions were taking place with the existing chef at Headington and current throughput was being monitored in order to determine potential demand. The need to ensure that students could continue to congregate in a catering outlet was highlighted, recognising that this represented important social interaction and could actually increase in an all-day venue. The new cafeteria would provide healthy, hot meals and those who currently qualified for meal entitlements would retain those. The Principal confirmed that there was no plan to outsource the catering provision although all procurement and provision were reviewed from time to time. The only option currently being discussed was the possible appointment of a temporary catering manager who would need to be very 'hands on' in such a small outlet but who could potentially assist in establishing the right ambience and business plan. The Principal reported that, together with the chef and the Finance Director, she planned to visit a number of other catering outlets to consider whether there was one on which the new facility could be modelled, perhaps through a smoother transition. It was generally felt that there would have to be a sustainable business model that at least broke even, and would need to allow Ruskin to continue to achieve the highest rating in the 'scores on the doors'. The Principal outlined aims to attract those who do not currently use Ruskin's catering facilities – staff and local residents – and that the provision of meals and drinks without charge to staff members could not be continued if prices were to be affordable.

9.4 Approved: the commentary on the Financial Plan.

Received: the proposed tuition fees for overseas and postgraduate students.

Noted: that the figure in the report was £8,500, bringing the cost in line with the undergraduate tuition fees previously agreed. The Principal requested that the wording in the report be changed to state that MA tuition fees be set at 'up to' £8,500, and that the Governing Executive charge the Management Team and the programme staff with looking again at the costings, to try to reduce the fees. Possible ways of doing this could be the introduction of more distance learning, a decrease in the number of residential weekends and a change in the deployment of staff. The need to agree an upper limit at all was questioned, but the Principal stated that it would be helpful to reassure potential students that the College would not be charging more than a certain amount. It was noted that the costings presented were based on a worst case scenario and on only one type of MA. It was also noted that a tuition fee of £8,500 represented a significant reduction for overseas students.

Approved: that the tuition fees for overseas and postgraduate students in 2012/13 should be up to £8,500 and that work should be carried out to try to achieve a lower fee.

(Teresa Munby joined the meeting at 11.58pm.)

10 Student fees

10.1 Received: extracts from the BIS White Paper 'Students at the Heart of the System'.

Noted: the Principal summarised the contents of the White Paper, which was out for

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consultation and proposed a consumer model for Higher Education, closer to the American model, aimed at cutting costs and which would give no government support to the Humanities or Social Sciences. Of particular significance to Ruskin (which could not compete for the 65,000 places for AAB A-level entrants) was the proposal that there would be 20,000 top-sliced places open to competition for institutions charging an average fee of up to and including £7,500 (after fee waivers). The Governing Executive had previously set fees at £8,500 for 2012/13, but the Management Team reported that, with the new information contained in the White Paper and with the only new entrants to higher education in 2012/13 being in Social Work and Youth and Community Work, it would be possible to offer an operationally-determined fee waiver in that year to bring this down to £7,500. (Students commencing a CertHE, or progressing from one and hence termed by the Government as 'end on' students, would not be affected by the new fees in that year.) The fullest engagement in the consultation process was urged.

10.2 Received: the Ruskin Student Union (RSU) resolution on student fees.

Noted: that the RSU was concerned that the proposed fees of £8,500 could prevent potential students from coming to study at Ruskin, especially as many would be adults with existing financial responsibilities. It believed that this would threaten the role of the College in offering a second chance for working people. All felt sympathetic with these concerns, but recognised that fees charged had to be based upon the costs of educating students at Ruskin. These costs were higher than at other institutions due to the level of learner support provided and the tutorial-based teaching methods. All agreed that everything that could practically be done to limit fees should be explored and every effort made to promote the College as widely as possible. Various possible methods of achieving this were discussed, including: a systematic approach to trade unions asking for financial support and highlighting the threat to Ruskin in the current climate; fundraising amongst individuals; consulting with staff to develop innovative ways of delivering and marketing courses; and the use of the proposed fee waiver. The Principal reported that a fund-raising case had been put together by an intern on secondment from Oxford University to highlight the unique nature of Ruskin and outline how people could help to fund bursaries and scholarships. It was intended that this be used to approach trade unions and other organisations, as well as individuals.

10.3 Approved: in the light of the preceding discussions, the proposed amendment to the previously agreed annual tuition fee for 2012/13 setting it at *up to* £8,500 per student.

11 Audit Committee

Received: the minutes of the Audit Committee meeting held on 17 June 2011.

Noted: that there had been no report on the Capital Project as there had been no concerns. The Audit Committee members would be completing a lengthy self-assessment questionnaire, which would be reviewed at the next meeting. There were also vacancies arising on the Audit Committee and potential new members would be approached shortly, from amongst names put forward by Search Committee. The Chair of Audit Committee offered to discuss what membership would entail for anyone interested. Meetings had been held in London, but the next would take place in Oxford where future venues were to be discussed. In response to a question, the General Secretary explained that the internal audit of human resource management had been conducted through the examination of policies and procedures, the Staff Handbooks, appraisal documentation and the staff development strategy.

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Organisation of the meeting

Agreed: that two items requiring decisions would be taken out of order, as the meeting would not be quorate after lunch.

12 Policy review

12.1 The Assessment Policy.

Noted: that this had been updated to bring it into line with the recently approved Learning and Teaching Strategy. It was noted that on page 3 'practice assessors' should be changed to 'practice educators'.

Approved: with this factual amendment, the Assessment Policy.

12.2 Received: the IT Regulations.

Noted: that there was an issue concerning the use of social networking sites by staff and students. The Principal reported that training she had recently undertaken had stressed that the new Web 2.0 world could not be controlled, so what needed to be thought about was how a college like Ruskin could engage in the on-line environment, to mould its reputation in new and positive ways. It was generally felt that students might need to be alerted to the potential dangers of presenting themselves negatively on commercially operated on-line networks.

Agreed: that the Management Team would take this to the next meeting of the new IT Committee and report back.

Approved: the IT Regulations.

Mgmt
Team

13 Clerk to the Governors

Noted: that Pearl Ryall had represented the Chair of the Governing Executive in the selection and interview process. There had been a very strong field of applicants and one had been offered the position, although the name could not be reported today as references had yet to be taken up.

Approved: that the Management Team should take this forward and proceed with the appointment of the preferred candidate.

Mgmt
Team

(The meeting adjourned for lunch at 12.55pm, at which point Wendy Dawson and Pearl Ryall left the meeting, and reconvened at 1.30pm.)

14 Annual update of Strategic Plan

Received: a report on the update of the Strategic Plan.

Noted: that this was approved by the Governing Executive in November. Since then, there had been a number of developments in both HE and FE which would have an impact on the Strategic Plan and the report outlined how the College was reacting to these.

15 Annual Governing Executive self-assessment exercise

Received: a self-assessment form for completion by all members present.

Noted: that this should be completed and returned to the Clerk.

16 Project Board

16.1 Received: minutes of the Project Board meeting held on 24 June 2011.

Noted: that the final snagging works for phase 1 would be carried out over the summer. Phase 2 was proceeding on schedule and on budget, and reports on the contractors were all favourable. The walled garden and surrounding area would be completed in time for the autumn, giving students at Headington more space for communal activities. The RSU was up and running again, which had meant a backlog

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of issues had been raised. Constructive discussions were taking place between the Management Team and RSU officers, who would continue to meet regularly.

16.2 Verbal update on Ruskin Fields

Noted: that Oxford City Council would take a decision in October as to whether to include the proposed development of Ruskin Fields with the Barton Area Action Plan when it goes forward for consideration by an inspector in the spring. The Principal reported that the College was having to change land agents, due to a conflict of interest that had come to light, and that a possible new agent had suggested the possibility of bringing in a developer at this stage, as the College would be facing high costs and a great deal of continuing work. A developer would expect a discount on a percentage of the final price achieved for the sale of the land, but would carry the risk by paying the up-front costs and carrying out the groundwork. The Principal asked for permission to explore this further. Those present felt that they would naturally wish to see further details in a written report before taking any such decision.

Agreed: that the Principal would bring a paper to the next meeting of the Governing Executive. AM

17 Academic Quality and Standards Committee

Received: minutes of part A of the meeting held on 17 June 2011.

Noted: that these illustrate that the College is monitoring all that it should be in terms of learning and teaching.

18 Principal's report

Received: a report from the Principal.

Noted: that the Quality Assurance Agency's IQER report was very positive. It included nine commendations and five recommendations – all of which were issues that the College was aware of and keen to work on. The Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) had been invited to come and carry out an organisational health check in order to help prepare for an Ofsted inspection. This went well, highlighting how Ruskin could put together more evidence to demonstrate what it was achieving, and this would be worked on over the summer. The Principal offered her thanks to all those involved in the summer buffet, who worked very hard to prepare the food and the venue. This had been followed by a ceremony at which Joe Callaghan, grandson of Jim Callaghan and current Ruskin student, had unveiled the foundation stone for the new academic building, which had been positively reported in the local press. The launch event for the new building would be taking place on 27 October 2012, and the Principal hoped that the Fellowship might hold their re-union that weekend and that a General Secretary of a trade union might make a landmark speech.

19 Student report

Received: a report on the work of the Ruskin Student Union.

Noted: that a successful Red Ball and garden party were held last week and the College were thanked for enabling these to happen. The continuing issues outlined in the report were being addressed with the Management Team.

(Hilda Kean left the meeting at 2.00pm.)

20 Date of meetings for 2011/12

Noted: the Principal reported that consideration was being given to merging the second Governing Executive of the summer term with the Council meeting and summer buffet. This would reduce the number of trips members were asked to

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make to the College and would mean that standard reports were not repeated. It was hoped that this would also address the quoracy problems that can sometimes occur at the July meeting. For practical reasons related to the circulation of meeting papers, the date of the joint meeting would need to be the later one, that is Council would move but Governing Executive remain the same. The proposal would be that Governing Executive would begin at 9.30am, when all decisions would be made and allowing roughly the same amount of discussion time as had been used today. Council would then join at 11.30am when the general reports would be discussed. It was noted that Governing Executive discussion should not be curtailed and that the different remits of the two bodies would need to be carefully maintained.

Agreed: that the Principal should discuss this with the Chair and members should consider the implications of such a change. This would be considered at the next meeting and in the meantime both dates should be held.

Noted: meeting dates for the next academic year, all at 11.00am and to be held at Walton Street unless there is notification of a change of venue:

- 25 November 2011
- 9 March 2012
- 11 May 2012
- 6 July 2012

Noted: that this was the last meeting of Pam Johnson and Rebecca Cox. Rebecca was thanked for all her hard work as Clerk, and Pam was thanked for her contribution as a very active member of the Governing Executive over the past eight years who would be missed.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 2.10pm.