

GOVERNING EXECUTIVE

Minutes of Part A of the five hundred and seventy-sixth meeting of the Governing Executive held on Friday 15th May 2015 at 11.00am at Ruskin College, Dunstan Road, Old Headington, Oxford, OX3 9BZ

Present:

Carole Orgell-Rosen (Chair) **CO-R**
ordinary member
Alan Shepherd (Vice-Chair) **AS** *ordinary member*
Cllr Van Coulter **VC** *ordinary member*
Wendy Dawson **WD** *ordinary member*
(part)
Rob Hancock **RH** *ordinary member*
Anne Hock **AH** *ordinary member*
Roger McKenzie **RM** *ordinary member*
(part)
Pearl Ryall **PR** *ordinary member*
Marva Small **MS** *ordinary member* (part)
Dr Peter Dwyer **PD** *staff member*
Guy Langton **GL** *staff member* (part)
Dr Chris Wilkes (Principal) **CW** *staff member*
Kieron Winters **KW** *staff member*
Rowan Padmore **RP** *student member*

In attendance:

Sally Courtney (Finance Director) **SC**
Paul Di Felice (Vice-Principal) **PDF**
Helen Jeffries (Clerk)

PART A

- 8** **Declarations of interest** Action
Rob Hancock and Roger McKenzie declared an interest as TUC members
- 9** **Minutes**
Received: the minutes of Part A of the meeting held on Friday 6th March 2015
Confirmed: as a correct record the minutes of Part A of the meeting held on Friday 6th March 2015.
A resolution was proposed that minutes of previous meetings should be taken at the end of the agenda with the other committee minutes.
Approved: minutes of previous meetings were to be taken at the end of the agenda.
- 10.** **Matters arising**
There were no matters arising.
Received: an overview of the outcomes for provision for refugees in Oxford and

Reading.

The Vice-Principal introduced the report. The following points were noted during the report and the discussion that followed.

Noted (10.1): that the paper explored the provision for refugees in terms of outcomes. The College worked with Oxford Refugee Resource and Reading Refugees. Success rates were below the minimum standard of success for literacy. This constituted a risk to the College in terms of possible intervention by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA). The distance between Oxford and Reading was a limiting factor as was the fragility of attendance from the students.

Noted (10.2): that the College had met with Oxford Refugee Resource and that a joint provision would be provided in the future.

Noted (10.3): that the College would promote community learning during Refugee Week.

Noted (10.4): recent guidance from government departments recommended that colleges worked within their locality.

Noted (10.5): that it would be worthwhile creating a programme where students would be able to achieve quickly in the first instance.

Noted (10.63): that in the current situation the College could not afford to run courses that do not pay. In light of the election result **RM** felt that the governing Executive needed to hold a general discussion about the way forward for the College.

MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORTS AND SPECIAL ITEMS

11. Principal's report

Received: a report from the Principal on current issues.

The following points were noted during the report and discussion that followed:

Noted (11.1): the Principal emphasised the last section of his report on external engagement. The Adult Skills Budget was unprotected and Ruskin had received a 10% cut in its funding allocation for 2015/16. This was forecast in the Recovery Plan.

Noted (11.2): that the Special Designated Institutions (SDIs) would respond jointly to a consultation document received from the Department for Business, Information and Skills (BIS) in March. The document sought to redefine Further Education and discussed second chance education.

Noted (11.3): that there were opportunities available for the College in Higher Apprenticeships and vocational areas, particularly Law.

Noted (11.4): that the trade union provision would be under threat in the future, but had expanded this year. The College was talking to the TUC, the Organising Academy and the individual unions about funding and if some of it could come from the unions.

Noted (11.5): that the College would move forward with its modernised HE curriculum and would provide new and revised HE courses in the future.

Noted (11.6): Work was being done to try to protect the College for the future and to make the College stronger. The College would continue to seize opportunities and to make difficult decisions.

Noted (11.7): (AH) The College should not wait to react and needed a long-term strategy. It would have to compete with Oxford Brookes and other universities and needed to anticipate changes in order to make Ruskin a place where students would want to study.

Noted (11.8): that trade unions were likely to fund their own staff and structures before funding elsewhere.

Noted (11.9): that the College was trying to pre-empt issues by reviewing the curriculum and taking the long-term view.

Noted (11.10): RH that TUC Education was assuming that there would be no public funding for them. RH agreed with the tone of the Principal's report, and noted that prospects were worse for other colleges. Some colleges had seen a large reduction in funding. TUC Education was fully funded in the next financial year, and if it was unable to be accommodated in other colleges it may be that Ruskin College and one or two other colleges in the South East would be the only places that provided the courses.

Noted (11.11): RM Unison would support Ruskin College as much as possible. An attack on union finances by the government was imminent. Unison was in the process of getting all its members to pay their union dues by direct debit, which was a huge task but had to be their priority. There could be no guarantee of funding from public service unions. The College would need to take some difficult decisions on how it could provide training for union activists. A wide strategic discussion was needed that would bring in all the pressures on funding.

Agreed: that the Clerk should set up a meeting before the next scheduled meeting of the Governing Executive.

Noted (11.12): AS Ruskin College was about widening participation, and it needed to do that in any way that it could within the restrictions laid upon it.

12 Vice-Principal's report

Received: a report from the Vice-Principal on teaching, learning and assessment. The Vice-Principal introduced the report; this was followed by a discussion. The following points were noted:

Noted (12.1): English and Maths success rates at the College were above the national average. The Access to HE Diploma was at a predicted 93% success rate. The College was very good at Further Education and this should be celebrated.

Noted (12.2): The College was being innovative within the curriculum with a number of new programmes planned for validation including a joint pathway in BA Social and Political Studies and Global and Labour Studies. The College would like to be able to provide skills in the public sector and on campaigning. A new BA in Working with Adults and Young People was planned-working with young people was a growth area. A new Access to HE Diploma in Health Professions had been validated.

Noted (12.3): the College had increased its work with trade unionists by £200k through a sub-contracted blended learning approach.

Noted (12.4): In support of the Observation of Teaching and Learning process, regular CPD sessions were available.

Noted (12.5): The next stage of the appraisal process for academic staff was to be rolled out at the end of June.

Noted (12.6): Work was in progress on narrowing the gap for dyslexic students.

Noted (12.7): a Student Conference would be held on 25th June.

Noted (12.8): The College was working on training for the new Prevent Duty Guidance, which was allied to the safeguarding procedures. The College was obliged to report any concerns through the safeguarding network.

Noted (12.9): RH queried the accreditation of the sub-contractor noted in 12.3. The

sub-contractor was accredited by NOCA. Due diligence had been undertaken. The training targeted the workplace and produced qualifications related to employment and personal development.

Noted (12.10): VC The Cavendish Report had recommended that care providers of end of life/palliative care gained appropriate qualifications. The College could consider providing such courses. The Chair noted that there were few providers at the moment. **AH** noted that this had been previously raised and that such courses could be funded through the NHS.

Noted (12.11): PR was encouraged by the report as progress was being made. Prospective students would be more discriminating about their potential studies and many would look at vocational courses, which Ruskin could provide. Cert HE could link into Higher Apprenticeships which could also work in Ruskin's favour.

13 Recovery Plan Action Plan

Received: an updated Action Plan

Noted (13.1): that the Action Plan was working towards 'Satisfactory' financial health next year and that the SFA was likely to be happy with the progress made.

Noted (13.2): AS was concerned that the voluntary redundancy of several support staff was handled sensitively and appropriately, especially as others would have to take on extra work. The Principal replied that line managers were discussing this with the staff remaining with the College. The Finance Director noted that almost 50% of the total staff leaving in 2015 were from the café.

14 Curriculum Review

Received: the report on the Curriculum Review

The Chair read out the first part of an e-mail from Professor Miriam David (who gave apologies for this meeting). The e-mail is copied below;

"Unfortunately neither Professor Bradley nor myself able to attend this important meeting of the Governing Executive tomorrow. As academic advisors to the college, we do wish to offer the following two comments which we would be most grateful if you would read or ask the chair to read to the GE meeting.

1. Re: GE/576A/Paper 5 (Agenda Item 14). Long course Curriculum Review 2015-20 to be presented by Paul Di Felice

One of the recommendations is to remove three programmes with very low recruitment, retention and progression. This includes the seminal and long-standing *MA in Women's Studies*.

Whilst we are acutely aware of the difficulties that Ruskin faces at the moment as feminist academics, responsible for the creation and development of women's studies, we deplore the necessity of this closure. This action would send an inappropriate signal to the wider academic community, given the revival of interest in feminism and women's rights. Please could we suggest that this course is NOT removed but given a temporary suspension until the college is on a surer footing?"

Noted (14.1): that the Curriculum Review should be discussed in the context of the recruitment of students and the viability of courses. It had been made more difficult by the intervention of the SFA. Colleagues reviewed the curriculum. Students were consulted and feedback was given at programme boards. The report listed the

recommendations.

Noted (14.2): the College had to make difficult decisions over the MA in Women's Studies, the BA in English Studies, Creative Writing and Critical Practice and the BA in History and Social Science. The decision to discontinue the courses had been made because of low recruitment, small class sizes at levels 5 and 6 and poor progression to levels 4, 5 and 6 and, in the case of Women's Studies, the low achievement rates over a 3 year period.

Noted (14.3): the College looked at how it would deliver the revised curriculum. Monthly meetings across the College with colleagues had looked at the use of semesters and modules.

Noted (14.4): VC reported that a group of governors had met with some students before the Governing Executive meeting. Low class sizes must be addressed, although it had been a huge advantage to VC in his time at Ruskin, 75% of costs on staffing was vastly out of line with the sector where the average was 60%.

Students had told the meeting that they had not been consulted or included and some of the reason for this could be that they were not sufficiently organised. This was balanced by the emergency caused by cuts in funding and the need to finance the loan for the Capital Project.

Students had also said that the College was too quick to close courses and not robust in marketing. This was balanced by reports of low enrolment in the courses under discussion. The College needs to be pragmatic. VC hoped that courses could be 're-kindled', but the College needed to be financially viable and hard decisions must be taken in order for the College to survive.

There was a willingness from some students to use their skills to the advantage of the College and it would be useful to audit their skills in order to work with the College on its viability.

The College might be able to draw down funds from the EU and should make enquiries, particularly in the area of addressing social inclusion.

Noted (14.5): AH understood why emotions ran high around the Women's Studies programme but under a robust curriculum review process it would come up again. It had not been 'tossed to one side' but was represented throughout all courses. AH was shocked at the misconceptions voiced at the meeting with the students, particularly around the financial aspects of courses. Students could be a positive resource, possibly in looking at sources of funding.

Noted (14.6): PR asked why the College should keep courses in which people were not interested. Courses had not been cancelled because of lack of money but because of lack of demand.

Noted (14.7): RM was unhappy at being accused of 'losing his moral compass'. He wished that the courses that were not recruiting were doing so, and that they could contribute to the working class movement. However if they were not appropriate to working class people at the moment the College needed to provide other ways to empower them.

Noted (14.8): MS thought that the review was very good.

Noted (14.9): GL felt that it was important that the governors knew the process involved. He was charged with recruiting the student representatives to programme boards each year. Student representatives from all disciplines were invited to meetings. No representatives had attended from Women's Studies, English Studies and History with Social Sciences. When GL challenged the Programme Co-ordinator in one of the groups he was told that only 2 people came to class and that students

were not available to consult. Various programmes had encountered dwindling interest over the years and GL felt that this had been obvious for 5 years. He found it disheartening that Programme Co-ordinators had not seen this.

Noted (14.10): PD taught across 7 cohorts and had discussed the Review with all of those students and had rarely met with a student who disagreed with the findings of the Review. Students had said that degrees should relate to what was needed by potential students. The majority of students supported the Curriculum Review, as did the vast majority of staff. PD had made it clear at Programme Boards that the Review was in the College's best interests, although outcomes were not guaranteed.

Noted (14.11): The Principal responded to the comments made. This had been the College's first curriculum review and it had been a good process. It was inclusive of academic staff and it was a minority that were unhappy with the outcome. The review would progress on a 5 year cycle.

The Principal agreed that the College should make more use of student skills and needed to find the best mechanism to enable this. One student had already been very helpful in the use of social media.

The Search Committee had discussed how the College could help student representation. The current student governor was very effective.

When looking at the future of the Curriculum Review, the College could look at further ways to involve students.

Noted (14.12): The Chair noted that she and the Vice-Chair had recently looked into a student complaint and found that incorrect student perceptions could be as damaging as facts. Both she and the Vice-Chair had been assured when they looked at the evidence that all that could have been done was done.

Noted (14.13): RM raised a question about the timing of the re-validation cycle, and whether it was sensible that it was on the same time frame as the parliamentary election cycle. **GL** replied that programmes were validated for 5 years and that this year was the College's lightest validation year so was the best year to start. The Vice-Principal pointed out that if the College were to look at another provider of validation the timings may change.

The Governing Executive was asked to approve the outcomes of the Curriculum Review. A vote was taken which was passed by a majority decision in favour of approval. There was one abstention.

Approved: the Curriculum Review.

1.30p.m-the meeting broke for lunch. The following people left the meeting at this point:

Wendy Dawson

Guy Langton

Roger McKenzie

Marva Small

The meeting re-convened at 2.00p.m. The meeting was now inquorate. It was decided to take the items for approval. Any approvals would be ratified at the next meeting on July 3rd.

POLICIES

16. Financial Regulations

Received: the updated Financial Regulations

Approved: the updated Financial Regulations

17. Staff Disciplinary Procedure

Received: the updated Staff Disciplinary Procedure

Approved: the updated Staff Disciplinary Procedure

18. Disciplinary Procedure for Senior Postholders

Received: the updated Disciplinary Procedure for Senior Postholders

Approved: the updated Disciplinary Procedure for Senior Postholders

Noted: that items 19-21, the Grievance Procedure, the Grievance Procedure for Senior Postholders and the Guidance re. Grievances against Senior Postholders will be taken to the July meeting.

ITEMS FOR APPROVAL

22. Meeting dates for the next academic year

Received: the meeting dates for the next academic year

Approved: the meeting dates for the next academic year.

23. Search Committee

Received: the recommendation of the Search Committee that Andrew Lantry be appointed as the Independent Member of the Audit Committee.

STANDING ITEMS

30. Student's report

Received: a verbal report on current issues from the student governor.

Noted (30.1): that the student governor had not been asked for feedback from Governing Executive meetings, but had met with the students who were unhappy about the Curriculum Review and had been open and honest with them. It appeared that student information was coming from other sources. **RP** had been readily available as the student governor. She had been asked for information on the Red Ball but had heard nothing else from possible members of the Ruskin College Students Union (RCSU).

Noted (30.2): **RP** felt that she had been given the sense that she had let down other students. However these students had been inactive before the current issues arose. **RP** felt that she had done her best.

Noted (30.3): **The Chair** gave the Governing Executive's thanks to **RP** and noted that she had been the best student governor in many years in terms of clarity and availability.

Noted (30.4): **RP** invited governors to the Ruskin Performance Day on Saturday 23rd May. Activities would include films produced from scripts by the students on the Writing for Performance course, a "Soapbox", and storytelling.

Noted (30.5): the Vice-Chair seconded the Chair's thanks on behalf of all the

governors. He suggested that an e-mail be sent to those students who had sought to disrupt the meeting, pointing out that it was appropriate for an elected representative to attend the meeting where issues were discussed. The Governing Executive would respond to people who were reasonable. There were many avenues available to students to participate in debate.

Noted (30.6): AH noted the importance of an active students union and that RP had to struggle against the odds. She was worried that there was no functioning committee. AH reported that fellow governor John Fray was appalled by the lack of political awareness shown during the election, and that students should have been lobbying.

The Chair read the second part of the e-mail from Professor Miriam David, copied below

"2. Re: Governing Council meeting July 3rd 2015.

As agreed at the last GE meeting on 6th March 2015, from matters arising from the Council meeting of July 2014, Professor Bradley and I have begun organising an event, to be held after the Council meeting to celebrate 45 years since the first and inaugural Women's Liberation Movement conference was held at Ruskin College. We have offers of short contributions from a number of participants and an exhibition from the *Sisterhood and After* interviews and collection in the British Library and also from the women's Library collection now held at LSE. The event will take place from about 4 pm ending at 8pm. The performance space has now been booked for this event."

There being no further business Part A of the meeting closed at 2.15pm

Signed by the Chair of the meeting succeeding that to which these minutes pertain

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