

Ruskin College

GOVERNING EXECUTIVE

Minutes of the five hundred and sixty-third meeting of the Governing Executive held on Friday 9th March 2012 at 11.00am at Ruskin College, Walton Street, Oxford (Raph Samuel Hall)

Present:	Wendy Dawson (part) John Fray (part) Karl Gay Des McDermott Roger McKenzie (part) Jo Morris (part) Audrey Mullender Teresa Munby David Norman (Chair) (part) Carole Orgell-Rosen Pearl Ryall Alan Shepherd Gerry Sherratt Kieron Winters	In attendance:	Sally Courtney Helen Jeffries (minutes) Chris Wilkes
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PART A

- 1 Apologies for absence** Action
Apologies were received from Chris Baugh, Jane Dixon, Ann Hock, Doug Nicholls, John Raftery, Liz Mathews, Jane Aldgate and Miriam David
Absent
Colin Taylor was absent without apologies.
- 2 Declaration of interests**
Noted: that no member present declared any interest, financial or otherwise, relating to any item on the agenda.
- 3 Election of Chair**
Noted: that David Norman was nominated as Chair of Governing Executive for a further year. This nomination was seconded and no further nominations were received.
Approved: the re-election of David Norman as Chair of Governing Executive.
- 4 Election of Vice Chair**
Noted: that Carole Orgell-Rosen was nominated as Vice Chair of Governing Executive for a further year. This nomination was seconded and no further nominations were received.
Approved: the re-election of Carole Orgell-Rosen as Vice Chair of Governing Executive.
- 5 Minutes**
Confirmed: as a correct record the minutes of Part A of the Governing Executive meeting held on 26 November 2010.

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6 Matters arising

Noted: that there were no matters arising.

7 Estates

7.1 Received: the minutes of the Project Board meeting held on 3 February 2012.

7.2 Agreed: that the meeting should take item 7.2 and 7.3 together.

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7.3 The Chair invited the Principal to introduce the item.

The Principal explained that the meeting was being asked to consider the options for further work on the Ruskin Fields project. Discussions about usage had been on-going for a long time and it seemed wrong that the land was vacant when it could be used to cover a housing need. The Principal pointed out that there were obstructions to development that had to be taken into account, including the Conservation Area status of the Old Headington area and neighbourhood opposition, and that money was needed for professional advice. The Principal reminded the Executive that the masterplan for the Fields provides for two fields to be used for housing (50% of which would be social), and that one field would be retained as a green area.

The Fields were important in local planning terms and would provide a link between the proposed developments at Barton and Northway. At the City Council meeting on 19th December it was suggested that the key to acceptance onto the Sites and Housing Allocation DPD (SHADPD) by the Inspector would be access and that further work was needed on this issue.

A decision was needed at this meeting on whether the College should move forward with further work in the hope of being accepted into the SHADPD. The Principal outlined the three options put forward in her paper.

- Option 1-to do nothing
- Option 2-to agree some additional funding and go forward to the Planning Inspector's examination of the Barton Area Action Plan and/or the Sites and Housing Allocation DPD. The estimated cost of this work from West Waddy ADP and other consultants was just under £90,000. This cost would potentially be spread over two financial years.
- Option 3-to go forward with a partner with funding support from the partner.

The Chair thanked the Principal for her paper.

Jo Curson from GreenSquare, as an example of a potential partner, presented to the Governing Executive on the company's background, partners, current work and ethos. She confirmed that a promotion agreement with GreenSquare would provide the company with the opportunity to purchase the land with consent at a discounted price in return for funding promotion costs and investing organisational resources.

The Chair thanked Ms Curson for her presentation and invited questions, which included the following;

- Would it be better to let the developments at Northway and Barton "settle" before embarking on another development, given that objections had been raised regarding Northway, in which GreenSquare in partnership with Hab Oakus was involved?
 - The Ruskin Fields development could run as a Ruskin development with GreenSquare in the background and does not have to involve Hab Oakus. Three people had raised objections but work had been delayed due to the presence of newts on the site, not as a result of objections.

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- In retaining green space, would GreenSquare build at a lower density and therefore not make full use of the land?
 - GreenSquare would make the best use of the land. They would build a relatively dense development as long as the spaces between the houses were good. The Ruskin Fields masterplan was good on open space.
- The promotion agreement suggested a 15% discount if the amount of units were to rise would the discount rise as well?
 - The discount would apply to the final development and would be a joint decision.
- If GreenSquare were to sell on to another developer would Ruskin College be able to safeguard its interests?
 - Yes, an overage agreement would be written into the promotional agreement.
- To what extent does property of different tenure impact on the value of the development?
 - If a development were to provide the maximum return on the land value it would provide the minimum amount of social housing, e.g. 70/30, but Oxford City Council requires at least 50%.
- Clarification of the costs was requested
 - The land would be subject to an evaluation by an independent valuer. GreenSquare would have first refusal on the land at this value minus 15%

The Chair thanked Ms Curson for her presentation. Ms Curson left the meeting.

The Chair noted that all members of the Governing Executive would have the chance to express their views individually. A full discussion was then held with all Executive members able to put their point of view. The Chair began the discussion by noting that the partnership option could be a preferred option but that, even so in order to comply with charity law, the choice of a partner in the development would need to go out to tender. The Principal then pointed out that because of timing issues (Planning Inspector's investigation in the summer) the Executive would need to think about option 2 or the decision would be to default to option 1. Opinions voiced included;

- Uncertainty about making a decision based on the current information
- Concern about the expense and resources being available to manage both the development and the move from Walton Street to the new premises in Headington. Unconvinced that it was the right time to develop
- Concern about the current recession, local opposition to the plans and costs.
- Nervousness about the costs of option 2
- Preference for development with a partner and for a cost benefits analysis of options 1 and 3 over the next 20 years.
- That property values were depressed at the moment and that a development was more likely to be accepted in the future.
- If the College decided on option 2 and was successful it would move the development on and not rule out option 3.
- A preference for hearing from other developers to see if a better deal could be reached.
- Not wanting to waste the money already spent, and therefore interested in option 2 on the basis that it may go forward to option 3 in the future.
- That the College went into the process knowing that money would have to be spent and that money from a sale would be welcome. That a gamble on option 2 would be worth taking.
- That, affordable housing is desperately needed and that, in the wider

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political view, it is wrong for Ruskin to hold onto land that could be used for housing when so many people are homeless. However also concerned that the College may “bite off more than it can chew” and that it should concentrate on its strengths. Need to think about the impact on staff. Option 3 would be the best route.

- That a cost benefit analysis would be worthwhile and that the College needed to plan to generate income for the future. The College was committed to education for working people and should extend that commitment to providing social housing. Option 2 would be a halfway stage, with option 3 in the background.
- The Principal then averred that the College had been braver in the past few years than it had ever been and that timing was crucial. It would be wrong to have got so far and not to take the extra step. She was against option 1 and would take the step of re-mortgaging her flat and loaning the money to the College at risk if the Executive felt unable to take forward option 2. Professional advice had indicated that the land had a good chance of being allocated and that it would be foolish not to try. There would be no reason why the work could not go forward in parallel, i.e. moving forward to the examination by the Planning Inspectors and looking for partners. The Fields use College resources for maintenance, e.g. of trees and drains, and, whilst the College is being brave, it should look at the whole estate and take the risk.

Wendy Dawson left the meeting at 12.45

The Chair then commented that he would not normally speak on issues unless they were of real importance, which this issue was. He reminded the Executive that it had a legal responsibility to ensure that the College’s assets were used in the best interests of the College, and that this was not a capitalist venture - that all trade unions make the best use of their property. The College had a small window of opportunity in which to move the position forward in terms of allocation of the land for housing, this would make the value of the land soar. Having considered all the options, the Chair recommended that the Executive accept option 2 and convene a further meeting to look at possible partnership working. The recommendation was seconded and voted upon.

Agreed: to move forward with option 2 - to agree some additional funding and go forward to the Planning Inspector’s examination of the Barton Area Action Plan and the Sites and Housing Allocation DPD. The estimated cost of this work from West Waddy ADP and other consultants was just under £90,000. This cost would be spread over two financial years.

8 *(The meeting then adjourned at 12.55 for the presentation of the Beacon Award cheque, followed by lunch, and reconvened at 1.45)*

David Norman, John Fray and Des McDermott left the meeting at 12.55. Carole Orgell-Rosen took the Chair.

9 **Finance and Risk** **Finance Committee**

9.1 **Received:** the minutes of the Finance Committee meeting held on 3 February 2012

9.2 **Received:** a report on the financial position to the end of December 2011
The Finance Director spoke to the report and commented that the expenses profit and loss showed the expected shortfall in tuition fees, which had been somewhat compensated for by additional funding from the SFA. The projected under-spend on salaries was due to some leavers and a lower than budgeted salary increase.
The General Secretary pointed out that there had been indications of a reduction in

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the expected level of SFA funding for next year and that the College would know about this by the end of March.

- 9.3 Received:** a report on tuition fees and tariffs for 2012/13
The fee level for incoming students had been set at £7.5k. The national average for fees was £8.5k, but the College had opted for £7.5k in order to be able to bid for student numbers with HEFCE if and when required.
The fees for the Cert HE were capped as the Adult Education Bursary Scheme funded them. The new fees would not apply to continuing students. Part-time fees had been set pro rata to full-time fees. The College would be offering en-suite accommodation to long course students in 2012-13 on a room-only basis, and catering would be charged for separately.
Agreed: tuition fees and tariffs for 2012/13
- 10 Received:** the annual report on Health and Safety
The General Secretary reported that the committee had been strengthened over the past year and now had active staff representatives. The committee was starting to look at issues at the redeveloped site.
The Principal thanked the General Secretary and the members of the Health and Safety Committee for their hard work, noting that student involvement in health and safety inspections was unusual and had received external commendation.

Governance

- 11 Policy review**
- 11.1 Received:** amendments to the Financial Regulations.
The Finance Director noted that the amendments had been made in order to clarify the regulations on payments to external tutors and to stress that claims for expenses must relate to the current financial year.
Approved: the amendments to the Financial Regulations
- 11.2 Received:** a review of the Risk Management Policy.
The General Secretary noted that no amendments to the policy were proposed but that the College would need to be aware of national developments. An SFA review of the audit code of practice could impact on the policy.
The Chair commented that the Audit Committee discusses risk at each meeting.
- 12 Received:** an audit of the Ruskin College Protocol for Excellence in Governance against the Foundation Code of Governance from the Association of Colleges.
The Clerk introduced the item by pointing out that the Ruskin Protocol was broadly similar to the AOC Code, with some minor differences, and that the AOC was asking Colleges to sign up to the Code or explain why not in their annual reports. The College was recommending that the Executive sign up to the Code.
In response to queries on item 1.8 of the Code regarding, giving due regard to the voice of the learners, the Principal commented that student representatives sit on the Governing Executive and that Ruskin students take part in a cross-College survey and the National Student Survey. The representative from the RSU enquired about the date of the last Council meeting of the year, being after the end of term. The Chair explained that this was due to the Audit cycle. The Principal said that expenses would be payable if any RSU member needed to travel or stay over to attend the meeting.

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- 12.1 Agreed:** that Ruskin College should adopt the Association of College's Foundation Code of Governance alongside the College's Protocol.
- 13 Received:** the proposed format of reporting to Governing Executive against KPI's and strategic objectives.
The Principal pointed out that the College was aiming for a dashboard approach and that the graphics before the Executive were indicative of what could be produced. They were in need of refinement, but it was hoped to furnish details regularly and in a clear manner.
- 14 Noted:** Notification of the absence of any changes to the governance arrangements for designated institutions.

15 Learning and Teaching

15.1 Academic Quality and Standards Committee

Received: the minutes of part A of the meeting held on December 9 2011.
Teresa Munby pointed out that the minutes had not yet been agreed by the AQSC. The Chair clarified that they were merely being received at this meeting.

15.2 Received: a verbal report on the OUVS Institutional Review

The College has been approved to offer Open University degrees for a further three years, but with the possibility of an upgrade to five years if the self-evaluation document is expanded. The additional work for this will be undertaken through an extra AQSC meeting in April and the Governing Executive in May.

Standing items

16 Received: the Principal's report

The Principal reported that a small capital payment from the SFA was to be used on IT infrastructure, and that some additional funding would be used to fund more courses, including ones for younger unemployed adults.

The College would be interviewing for tutors in History, Politics and Creative Writing, plus a Librarian and a web-based IT technician.

On property the Principal reported that the capital project remains broadly on time and within budget and that a move management company has been appointed.

On external engagement, it was noted that the College continues with its work in many different areas, including with Crisis Skylight and on the Barton estate. The College staff and students are also very excited by the scope and inclusiveness of the launch event for the new building on Saturday October 27th.

In the area of equality and diversity, the Principal noted that this was a new heading for the report and that the College's harassment policy needs a definition aligned with that in the new Act, which would come to GE once it has been drafted.

17 Received: a verbal report on the work of the Ruskin Students Union

The RSU president reported that it had been a challenging start to the year but that the union was now attempting to streamline as many functions as possible and allowing executive officers autonomy within their roles.

The RSU held a successful social evening and were working hard on the Red Ball. Officers were also working on an instruction manual for future committee members. The RSU had raised concerns about available accommodation at Ruskin Hall and

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observed that it would be unfortunate if the move to the Headington site were to adversely affect students. They appreciated the response they had received from the Principal and the idea of a dedicated member of Finance staff who would help with accommodation issues.

The Principal responded that the College believed that there would be enough accommodation and that assistance from staff had commenced ahead of a new appointment being made.

18 **Noted:** the dates of the remaining meetings for 2011/12

- 11 May 2012 11.00am
- 6 July 2012 9.30am followed by Council and the Summer Buffet

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 2.30pm.