Executive Report: HR Director

Council received the annual Executive Report from the HR Director (C.13-14/61).

Attending the meeting to present her report, Mrs Lofthouse drew Council’s particular attention to the summary report of the recent staff engagement survey, and in particular the following aspects:

- 72% response rate and 80% engagement index, which were both positive compared to other HEIs and similarly sizes private-sector organisations;
- highly positive ratings for all questions under the heading ‘perceptions of the University’;
headline results as regards the highest and lowest scoring questions and the most and least improved areas (against 2011 scores);
notable variations in response in some areas depending on staff category.

During discussion of specific features of the survey outcome, the following points were noted:

(a) Communication by managers emerged as an issue in some areas, including in discussion of performance and in management of change (the latter area showing no change in score since the previous survey).

(b) A high percentage (47%) of staff reported having had to work “excessive hours” in the previous twelve months, although there were significant variations by staff category. Although such outcomes seemed at odds with the generally positive perception of working at the University, it was agreed that many organisation shared such a seemingly anomalous profile in which long-hours culture (and staff complaints about this) did not detract from overall satisfaction with the working environment. The link was also acknowledged between high levels of engagement and a willingness to deliver considerable discretionary effort.

(c) There were considerable variations by staff category in areas such as work-related stress, job security, dealing with poor performance and perceptions of SMG. Analysis of the data by length of service also showed variations.

(d) Significant improvements were shown in the scores relating to responsiveness to survey outcomes, transparency in senior management communication and some aspects of learning and development.

(e) Perceptions of performance management emerged as a key issue, with a spread of responses to questions relating to individual performance review and the handling of poor performance. These seemed to be some disparity between the relatively positive appraisal of individual managers in this area and the overarching perception. It was also an area of notable variation between academic and support staff, which would be subject to deeper analysis. As regards training on performance management, attention was drawn to the increasing number of staff attending core leadership programmes, all of which now
included a performance management element. It was also reported that this more structured and centralised approach had been exemplified in the recent performance appraisal of the professoriate, which would be assessed before implementation across other staff groups. The Vice-Chancellor emphasised the need to approach this topic with appropriate sensitivity and understanding for cultural and historical differences (eg across academic disciplines and even within the same department) in order not to de-motivate the majority of high performing staff who delivered the additional voluntary effort reported elsewhere in the survey. Although there were some difficulties in defining objective criteria as regards standards and expectations in the academic context, considerable work was being undertaken as part of the overarching performance excellence project. Academic members of Council reported that the training provided by the University on this matter was valuable and increasingly popular among academic managers who understood their line management responsibility to colleagues. It was agreed that the key to developing an appropriate performance management culture was a clear understanding of the underlying drivers for academic behaviour and success, while at the same time avoiding a crudely mechanistic approach that might have unfortunate unintended consequences (eg demotivation of high achievers). It was however also stressed that effective performance review provided the opportunity to highlight and acknowledge excellence, a positive aspect of the process that might be more overtly emphasised.

(f) All departments would shortly receive a results pack and online data analysis tool to assist in the action planning process. Discussions would be held with staff and action plans developed by January 2015. Monitoring of progress with action plans over the three years before the next survey would include publicising where remedial actions had been taken in response to staff comments.

(g) The lack of benchmarking figures in some areas and the apparent discrepancy between the headline summary and some outcomes was explained by the methodology used by the external survey provider, which focused on a core sub-set of the questions when drawing out the headline results.

(h) The figures relating to harassment/bullying had not shifted since the previous survey, but remained positive relative to other sectors. It was reported in this context that claims of
harassment could emerge during disciplinary cases (as a counter-accusation), and that the matter was therefore related to performance management in some cases. An increase in such claims could also be expected as a more rigorous approach was adopted to the handling of poor performance. It was also noted that the equality and diversity office had undertaken further exploratory work on harassment after the previous survey, and this had not raised any significant concerns. There was likewise little evidence from grievance cases or exit questionnaires that harassment was a major issue.

(i) With regard to the growth in staff headcount between 2012/13 and the current year (ca. 200 staff), it was noted that this related mainly to academic and research posts arising from the anniversary recruitment round, as well as departments staffing up ahead of their REF submission. It was noted that staff numbers had risen consistently year on year while staff costs (as a percentage of turnover) had remained relatively static at about the sector average (55%). Council noted when spikes in recruitment arose during the year as posts were authorised and released in the medium-term planning cycle, with a likely increase in fixed-term research posts as the University sought to grow its research income (M13-14/74 below refers).

Council thanked the HR Director for her executive report and encouraged the Vice-Chancellor and his senior team to maintain a strong focus on performance management initiatives, noting that these would be central to moving the whole University forward and achieving the ambitions of the new institutional strategy.

13-14/66 Declaration of Conflicts of Interest

Members were invited to declare any potential conflicts of interest relating to the business of the meeting. None were declared.

13-14/67 Membership

On behalf of Council the Chair thanked those members attending their last meeting (Brian Greenwood and Matt Burton) and welcomed the new SU President (Sam Maguire). It was noted that the new GSA President (Jelena Horvatic) would become an ex officio member when she took up office in September 2014.
The unreserved minutes of the meeting held on 20 June 2014 were approved (C.13-14/62). Council also noted the action schedule based on the minutes (C.13-14/63).

**Vice-Chancellor’s Report**

Council received a report from the Vice-Chancellor on a number of current matters (C.13-14/64).

The Vice-Chancellor drew particular attention to the following aspects of his report:

- high level of engagement with the strategy consultation process;
- Guardian University Guide 2015 and the iGrad (Student Barometer) Survey;
- award of honours to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Head of the Department of Health Sciences in the Queen’s Birthday Honours list;
- likely changes to the USS pension scheme to address the fund’s projected deficit of ca. £8-13bn, with an associated risk of possible industrial action;
- overview of management planning for the forthcoming confirmation, clearing and adjustment process.

During discussion of the USS pension situation, it was noted that the pensions regulator was insisting that the deficit be addressed, with the current timetable set on reaching agreement in early 2015. Following discussion of some of the technical aspects of the likely changes to scheme benefits (including universal application of the career revalued benefit principle and a move to limit the value of benefits subject to index linking before or after retirement), Council decided formally to encourage the Vice-Chancellor to support efforts to tackle the deficit when USS consulted with employers via UUK. It was agreed that positive and timely communication with the large number of staff affected would be crucial when the precise proposals for change emerged from the complex negotiation process.

**Budget 2014/15 and Financial Forecasts to 2017/18**

FOI EXEMPT/COMMERCIAL/IN CONFIDENCE

**Piazza Building on Heslington East**

FOI EXEMPT/COMMERCIAL/IN CONFIDENCE
13-14/72 Model Constitution for Colleges

Council considered a model constitution for the colleges (C.13-14/67).

Presenting the draft constitution, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor confirmed that it had been developed by a working group co-chaired by the Academic Registrar and SU President following consultation with college councils. In response to a query on line management arrangements in colleges, it was noted that the Heads of Colleges/Provosts reported to the Senior Principal (a new role created in 2013/14), who in turn reported to the Academic Registrar.

Noting that it had been recommended by the Student Experience Committee, Council approved the model constitution.

13-14/73 Constantine College Council

Council approved the establishment of a council for the new Constantine College (C.13-14/68), noting that its constituency was in accordance with the new college model (M13-14/53 above refers).

13-14/74 Executive Report: Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research)

Council received the annual Executive Report from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor/Research (C.13-14/69), which was presented on her behalf by the Vice-Chancellor who highlighted the following:

- ongoing development of the new Research Strategy, including identification of interdisciplinary research themes;
- approval of an inter-linked suite of new research-related policies to ensure compliance with new external requirements;
- benchmarking of research grant performance via analysis of metrics on market size and grant income per academic (reflecting the increasing concentration of funding in institutions with the highest capacity).

During discussion the following points were noted:

(a) The establishment of a Graduate Research School was intended to ensure equity in the postgraduate student experience, especially as regards training provision, and to facilitate strategic allocation of research support funding.

(b) The market share analysis (Table 2 and Appendix 4 of the report refer) identified those subject areas where the University’s
performance lagged behind competitors, which in turn informed the development of future strategy. There were however positive signs that recent trends were gradually being reversed (eg as indicated by recent confirmation of the University as a strategic partner with EPSRC).

(c) In response to a query, it was noted that the market share data in Appendix 4 was for all University research, not just sciences. Data by cluster was considered by SMG and sub-sets of the whole information set were also factored into MTP discussions with individual departments.

(d) The high level of grant support for clinical medicine (39% of charity funding and 26% of government funding) reflected the high priority ascribed to this area by government.

(e) The decline in application and award values in the current 2013/14 year related to the cessation of European Framework 7 funding, which was reflected in the flat trend for overall income in the budget and forecasts.

Council thanked the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for the report, welcoming in particular the provision of more fine-grained data that confirmed the strategic challenges faced by the University in the research area.

13-14/75 Executive Report: Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Business & Community) FOI EXEMPT/COMMERCIAL/IN CONFIDENCE

13-14/76 Annual Feedback Questionnaire

Council considered a report summarising the feedback on effectiveness submitted by individual members via the annual questionnaire (C.13-14/71).

Noting the generally positive assessment of Council’s effectiveness as a governing body, the Chair and Governance Officer identified the following as specific areas where actions would be taken in response to members’ comments:

- campus tour to understand better the physical condition of the campus and how this related to capital development priorities;

- briefing from the Director of Admissions on work undertaken in the area of access/widening participation (in the context of the University’s agreement with the Office for Fair Access);
consideration of options for electronic circulation of papers (starting with ‘electronic only’ circulation of the ‘business for information’ section of the agenda);

more open invitation to members to suggest topics for the pre-lunch briefing sessions, including in respect of non-academic activities;

attempt to benchmark (via internal audit) board effectiveness relative to other HEIs.

As a general point, the Chair particularly welcomed the positive comments on the more open and collegial atmosphere in meetings, with members’ comments being valued and business being debated in a more productive manner, thereby enhancing Council’s contribution.

13-14/77 Financial Performance Data

Council received for information financial performance data for the period ended 31 May 2014 (C.13-14/72).

13-14/78 Business from Committees

Business from the following committee meeting was noted and approved (C.13-14/73):

Nominations Committee: 4 July 2014 (including appointment of Caroline Thomson as a new lay member of Council with effect from 1 August 2015)

13-14/79 Equality and Diversity Annual Report

Council received for information the executive summary of the annual report from the Equality and Diversity Office (C.13-14/74).

13-14/80 Schedule of Business

Council received for information its Schedule of Business for 2014/15, including the schedule of Executive Reports (C.13-14/75).

13-14/81 Unreserved Business from Senate

Council noted the following unreserved business from the meeting of the Senate held on 15 July 2014:
(a) annual comparator reports on:

(i) undergraduate outcomes (C.13-14/76)
(ii) postgraduate taught outcomes (C.13-14/77)
(iii) postgraduate research outcomes (C.13-14/78)

(b) ethics code of practice (C.13-14/79).

13-14/82 Use of Seal

Council approved the use of the Common Seal of the University (details available in the Registrar’s office).

13-14/83 Dates of Meetings in 2014/15

The dates of meetings in 2014/15 were noted as follows:

Friday 14 November 2014
[Thursday 15 January 2015 - Away Day]
Friday 27 February 2015
Friday 12 June 2015
Friday 24 July 2015