MINUTES of the Court Strategy Day held on Tuesday, 1st April, 2014
in Room 028, Blake Building, Medway Campus, Central Avenue, Chatham Maritime,
Kent ME4 4TB commencing at 10.00 am

Present: Mr S Howlett (in the Chair)

Mr A Albert Mr P F Hazell
Mr J Barnes Mr A L Holmes
Mr A Brooks Mrs D Khanna
Dr J Cullinane Mr W Leech
Mr S H Davie Prof D Maguire
Mr L Devlin Prof P Maras
Mr N Eastwell Ms E Passey
Ms M Hay Prof M Snowden

In attendance:

Prof T Barnes (Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research & Enterprise))
Mrs T A Brighton (Minutes Clerk)
Dr L Burke (Pro Vice-Chancellor: Education & Health Faculty)
Prof J Burnett (Pro Vice-Chancellor: Architecture, Computing & Humanities Faculty)
Mr R V T Daly (Director of Finance)
Mr C Hallas (Interim University Secretary)
Prof S Jarvis (Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic Development))
Mr J Sibson (Pro Vice-Chancellor: Business Faculty)

Apologies for Absence: Mr J Stoker, Mrs H Wyatt

1. WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Medway Campus for the Court Strategy Day.

He stated that the University had had a successful and eventful year. Baroness Scotland had been appointed as the new Chancellor. The University had exceeded its recruitment target for full-time home under-graduate students. However the University could not afford to become complacent and the purpose of the Court Strategy Day was to look at some of the key issues which would help carry the University forward. These would include some of the points raised in his 1-2-1 discussions with Members of Court such as how the widening participation agenda fits with the objectives to improve quality and how the development of the estate aligns with the strategic objectives.

2. EXTERNAL CONTEXT AND STATE OF THE UNIVERSITY: PROFESSOR DAVID MAGUIRE, VICE-CHANCELLOR
The Vice-Chancellor presented an overview on the current state of the University.

2.1 External Context

Political parties were starting to formulate their policies on HE ahead of the planned General Election in 2015. There were some indications that the Labour party was thinking of reducing student fees. Such a move could have considerable impact on HEI finances. The next year or so would bring challenges to the University’s other main funding streams. Changes in the funding strategy in the areas of research and NHS, together with a new scheme for training teachers, would put budgetary pressure on the current research, health and teaching activities.

On a more positive note, the University had seen an increasing demand for its academic programmes. There was evidence to suggest that the University’s reputation as a quality provider of higher education was growing.

2.2 Current Status of the University

The Vice-Chancellor highlighted some recent key achievements:

- Implementation of the Strategic Plan was broadly on track. The University had seen good progress with key targets for recruitment and good honour degrees and Greenwich had been placed 70th in the Guardian League Table.

- The balance sheet was becoming stronger and a projected surplus of £10 million for 2013-2014 would help compound the institution’s financial stability.

- The University had submitted a strong submission in the REF exercise and Officers were hopeful that it would yield a positive outcome.

- A recent audit by the UKVI of the University’s arrangements for recruiting international staff and students had proceeded smoothly and the University had retained its Highly Sponsor Trust.

- Recruitment statistics for undergraduates for 2014-2015 were currently encouraging. Both applications and acceptances were ahead of the same point in the previous year’s cycle with acceptances already at a third of the target of 4200. Efforts in overseas recruitment were continuing and it was anticipated that the previous year’s student numbers would be maintained.

Court Members were also briefed on the focus of current activities and areas requiring improvement. Some proposals for the long term development of the University were also outlined. It was fundamental to the future of the university that student numbers are maintained and the Court Long Term Strategy Group was taking forward some of the possibilities for encouraging growth, for example the establishment of an international pathway college. The feasibility of setting up an international campus was also under consideration.
The DVC (Academic Development) stated that higher education gave people the opportunity to transform their lives. Participation rates for young people varied tremendously across the UK. There was a strong correlation between deprivation and student participation and the University’s campuses were surrounded by areas historically known to have low participation rates. 13.2% of the current undergraduate intake comprised students from low participation neighbourhoods which was above national benchmark figures.

Widening participation continued to be an important part of the University’s work. It’s outreach work encompassed a range of activities including those designed to raise the aspirations of school and college leavers. The introduction of the Skills for Independent Learning course and HE Workbooks which helped prepare students for HE increased access into higher education from under-represented and vulnerable groups. Such interventions appeared to be having a positive effect in encouraging these groups to enter higher education. It was noted that a HEFCE report on differences in degree outcomes had important implications for the University. It confirmed that across the sector participation of students from disadvantaged backgrounds had risen but that their background continued to influence final outcomes.

The University would need to work harder to ensure that a disadvantaged background was not a hindrance to final degree outcomes. There had been some improvement in retention rates and for the coming year a strategic decision had been taken to invest additional resources into activities designed to improve student success.

In discussion, the following points were made:

- The Court remained committed to continuing the University’s traditional work in widening participation access but agreed that the quality agenda was of equal importance.
- The University had an obligation to provide adequate support to all its students but needed to invest more resources in supporting those from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Time was an important resource. The personal tutoring system was a valued mechanism for raising the expectations of students and providing support.
- There might need to be a cultural shift in order to enable academics to have the time to engage more directly with students.

The DVC (Research & Enterprise) stated that there had been a discernible improvement in the quality of the University’s research profile since the 2008 RAE. The recent REF submission was testament to this but the external environment was changing and the University faced serious challenges in the future. Changes in government policy were
likely to lead to an increased focus on interdisciplinary research programmes with future research funding concentrated in a smaller number of institutions.

The University would need to continue to concentrate on improving the quality of its research. It would need to be embedded further into the teaching and culture of the University so as to allow greater numbers of students to be exposed to research. The University would need to improve its research reputation and networks nationally and internationally. Researchers would need to create high quality results relevant to the world of business and industry. As part of its future strategy for research, the University had set itself some ambitious targets for achievement by 2020. It was intended to grow the number of research publications, research active staff, world class researchers and research students. The current thinking envisaged an inter-disciplinary and cross-Faculty approach with a focus on industry-facing themes.

The Court received individual presentations on the following research case-studies included in the REF Submission:

- “Better Pest Control” by David Grzywacz
- “Enabling Older Adults, Carers and Clinicians to Measure and Manage Pain” by Pat Schofield
- “New Materials for transport and aerospace through computer modelling” by Koulis Pericleous

The Court noted that the University needed to create a different research culture if it wished to achieve its targets. It was recognised that getting money to support research was important and the costs of this new approach were anticipated to be expensive. Externally gained revenue in direct support of research activities would need to be increased.

5. OPEN DISCUSSION

The Court divided into four break-out groups. Feedback from discussion on the following issues is summarised below.

5.1 Widening Participation

- What sorts of interventions do you believe will be most effective in bringing about positive change and ensuring that disadvantage does not continue during and after University?
- In what areas and in what ways should OFFA Agreement spend be directed towards?

The Court had been interested to note the relationship between student attainment and student background. Members believed there could be value in drilling down the statistics on attainment. There had been some discussion on the possibility of earlier identification of students who might benefit from targeted assistance and support. The role of higher education in creating well-rounded individuals was also recognised. Extra-curricular activities, such as volunteering, studying a language, would help broaden students’ skills, hone their social skills and instil confidence.
The benefits of a centrally coordinated programme to improve students’ employment prospects were emphasised. Life skills such as interview technique, competence in making presentations and CV writing, were integral to securing graduate level employment. Greater use of alumni in motivating students and preparing them for the future was suggested.

There was general agreement that the resources were being directed in the right way. The Court wondered whether greater investment in activities in secondary schools. The Faculty structure should provide scope for implementing a more coordinated and targeted approach. The Court asked for a more detailed report on the strategy in this area to be provided to a future meeting of Court.

5.2 **Research**
- How should research be positioned vis a vis teaching?
- Achievement of our research agenda will require substantial investment of resource (both time and money). How should this be balanced against other calls on university resources?

The Court was in agreement that teaching was the principal business of the University but that research made a valuable contribution to its overall work. Research was known to inform teaching but a possible tension between research and teaching was acknowledged. Any enhancement of the research programme should not lead to polarisation of researchers and teachers, or to a dilution of the teaching experience. The pros and cons of recruiting “teaching only” academics were discussed.

A campaign of awareness of the benefits gained from research was suggested. The research function would need to be largely self-financing and funding of the enhanced research cohort was discussed. It was agreed that the Executive would need to consider how to address the increase in funding for its research agenda (estimated to be £30m-£40m per year).

6. **ESTATES STRATEGY REVIEW : PROFESSOR DAVID MAGUIRE, VICE-CHANCELLOR, PETER FOTHERINGHAM, HEAD OF ESTATES, AND CHRIS POWNER, DIRECTOR OF FACILITIES MANAGEMENT**

As contextual background, the Court received paper CRT 13/P70 (Estate Strategy: Summary Review) outlining the current and planned activities to progress the Estate Strategy.

The Head of Estates gave a detailed exposition of the development of the estate. The consolidation of the estate at Greenwich complemented the scale and growth of activities centred there. The relocation of staff and facilities to the new Stockwell Street building opening in September 2014 offered the opportunity to redevelop the Dreadnought Building as a one stop shop for student-facing services. A range of options was being worked up but if the building was redeveloped to optimise its full potential, the cost was anticipated to be in the region of £18 million. Considerable investment in student residences in the vicinity of the Greenwich was being made to accommodate the growth in demand.
The Court was supportive of the plans to consolidate services and provide a hub for students but cautioned that the University needed to be clear on priorities if committing to investment on the scale envisaged. There had been some preliminary consultation on the use of the space but the wider engagement of the Students’ Union and other interested parties was still to take place. In all likelihood a compromise on the requirements of staff and students would need to be reached.

The plans for the disposal of the Mansion Site were progressing. The bid for Heritage Lottery Funding to help renovate the Winter Garden was proceeding. Plans to redevelop areas of the Mansion House for conference use would provide a new revenue stream in the future. The balance of the site would be sold for redevelopment. Options for the relocation of the Faculty of Education & Health were being worked up.

The purchase of the Pembroke reversionary lease had secured the University’s presence at Medway. The recent acquisition of the C4 site now enabled the provision of additional and modern student space through the refurbishment of the swimming pool.

The Court noted that a large proportion of the estate was under major change. The estimated costs of development for the five year period to 2017-2018 were currently estimated to be c£42 million. There was some concern that the scope of work was being driven by financial rather than strategic factors. Future investment across the campuses was not evenly distributed. This apparent disparity in investment could have consequences for student experience and the executive should not lose sight of the importance of providing a consistent experience across all campuses.

The Court noted that there was no central committee in place with responsibility for the management and future planning of the University’s estate. The establishment of such a group was a matter for the executive but it was a practice in place in other higher education institutions.

### 7. CUC CONSULTATION ON HE CODE OF GOVERNANCE: CHRISTOPHER HALLAS, INTERIM UNIVERSITY SECRETARY

The University Secretary stated that the session on the CUC’s new HE Code of Governance was designed to provide Members with an opportunity to contribute to the consultation exercise. The new Code would supersede the 2004 Governance Code of Practice and General Principles and would provide a framework for the self-regulation of HEIs. The Code was being developed in consultation with sector bodies and the closing date for feedback was 18 April 2014. The final version of the Code was due to be submitted to the October 2014 CUC Plenary for approval.

It was noted that, although adoption of the Code was voluntary, compliance was regarded to be indicative of best practice. The new Code set out ten key elements of HE governance. It placed an increased emphasis on academic governance, on financial, strategic and environmental sustainability and on equality and diversity. The Code identified the role and responsibilities of governing bodies and appeared to award them greater authority for operational matters than was currently the case.
The Court recognised that a review of University governance arrangements was timely. The review would take place once a permanent University Secretary was in post to coordinate and facilitate the process. External assistance would also be enlisted to help comparison within the sector and beyond. Review of the governance structure would encompass revision of the Memorandum and Articles of Association, which had been in place since 1996 and would need to reflect the future governance model.

8. OPEN DISCUSSION

The Court divided again into four break-out groups. Feedback from discussion on the following issues is summarised below.

8.1 Estate Strategy Review:
- Will the Estate Strategy allow the University to deliver its strategic ambitions over the course of the next five years and beyond?
- What additional capabilities and skills should the University put in place to ensure successful delivery of the Estate Strategy?

The Court was mindful of the importance of the estate strategy but recognised that it represented just one component of delivery of the Strategic Plan. Implementation of the estate strategy involved significant capital expenditure and due consideration needed to be given to the opportunity cost of pursuing it. There was too much focus on buildings and it was important to understand where the money on estates was being spent every year.

There was a general view that the University had the requisite capabilities and skills to deliver the strategy. However, there was support for the establishment of an internal forum comprising both student and cross-campus representation. Such a group should have the opportunity to help define the plans for growth and have a say in how to optimise the use of current buildings. The Finance Committee needed to understand the extent of internal discussions and the implications for other University operations when considering proposals for estate development.

The Dreadnought Building was critical to the development of the estate as it offered premium flexible space. The Court clearly believed that a student hub along the lines conceived would be a valuable use of the space but recommended further time for consultation in order to make an informed decision. Ensuring that the estate was attractive to students remained a key priority.

8.2 CUC Consultation on HE Governance:
- How should the University respond to CUC on “drafting style” and how should we rate the consultation, section by section?
- If the University were to make comments about any specific sections of the Code, or additional comments, what would the top three priority comments be?

The Court provided feedback on the individual sections of the CUC questionnaire. In general Members accepted that the draft new Code was an improvement on the current version. The device of a statement of primary responsibilities and schedule of delegated authority clarifying the role of governing bodies was welcomed. However, there was a
consensus of opinion that the balance between prescription and institution discretion had not changed for the better. An increased responsibility had been placed on governors to attest and assure that operational matters were all in order rather than rely on assurance from the Executive. Members were critical of this shift in balance and believed that some of the absolute obligations were inappropriate. The executive was asked to make explicit reference in the University’s response to the need for a clearer distinction between the “ensure” and “be assured” obligation. As currently drafted, the Code implied a role for governors that they are not able to fulfil and should not fulfil.

Concern was expressed that potential new governors might be less likely to seek nomination and appointment to governing bodies. Good quality governors were difficult to find and the draft new Code appeared to impose more onerous responsibilities upon individuals. There was some discussion on remuneration as a means of encouraging interest. The transparency of the current recruitment system of governors was questioned. It was a continuing concern that the composition of the Court failed to reflect the diverse nature of the student body. This was an issue which would need to be addressed. A skills audit and equality and diversity survey would be conducted in advance of the next meeting of the Nominations Committee taking place in May.

9. FINALE

The Chair of Court thanked presenters and contributors for an interesting day. The campus tour and the research presentations had been particularly noteworthy.

He assured the Court that the outstanding issues raised in the one-to-one meetings would not be forgotten but would be dealt with at a later stage. The Court had expressed a particular interest in the branding/marketing review being conducted by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Business Faculty). This was nearing completion and the issue would be considered at a future meeting.

He noted that the University was required to respond to the CUC consultation exercise on HE governance by 17 April, the day before the official deadline. The Vice-Chancellor and University Secretary would reflect on the best way to take this forward.

The meeting ended at 4.55 pm.