

THE ASSEMBLY



Minutes of the meeting held on 4 June 2014

Present: The Chair of the Standing Committee of the Assembly (Mr K. Harper) (in the chair), the Vice-Chancellor (Professor E. Acton), the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Professor D Richardson), Professor Ian Harvey, Phil Steele, Amanda Giles, Claudina Richards, Steve Oldfield, Kate Hesketh, Amanda Williams, Dr Susan Sayce, Gideon Middleton, Phil Steele, Dr Spyros Themelis, Janet Cogman, Oliver Dean, Tim Southon, Rosalind Hewett, Catherine Thornett, David Astley, Geoffrey Hinchliffe, Jane English, Natalie Jones, Sarah Taigel, Antje Hreutzmann-Gallasch, Katy Quigley, Natasha Gales, Sallyann Lloyd, Kay Baker, Ollie Carlisle, Grant Wheeler, Prof Alastair Forbes, Tharin Blumenschein, Sue Armes, Chris Hall, Prof Duncan Sheehan, Wendy Bainham, Sarah Elsegood, Emma Godbold, Rosie Hannant, Prof Jacqueline Collier, Jeremy Goodenough, Myroslava Puttock, Caroline Kavanagh, Matthew Gooch, Prof Vincent Moulton, Prof Shaun Stevens, Mark Cooker, Lauren Butler, Richard Delahaye, Victor Morgan, Clementine Jones

(Please note the above are those who signed the attendance sheets)

With: The Registrar and Secretary and the Director of Planning (Mr I. Callaghan).

Apologies: Lee Marsden (PSI), Angelina Bingley (ARM)

1. MINUTES

Confirmed

the minutes of the meeting held on 5 June 2013.

The minutes can be found online at:

<https://intranet.uea.ac.uk/committeeoffice/ueacombds/ass>

2. STATEMENTS BY THE VICE-CHANCELLOR

There were no statements.

3. STATEMENTS BY THE CHAIR OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE OF THE ASSEMBLY

There were no statements.

4. MEMBERSHIP OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE OF THE ASSEMBLY

Reported

(1) that the membership of the Standing Committee of the Assembly was:

Ex-officio – VC & PVC's

Members elected by the Assembly:

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Mr R. Delahaye (2014)
Mr K. Harper (2016) (Chair)
Dr L. Marsden (2014)
Ms C. Richards (2014)
Dr T. Southon (2014)

+ 3 vacancies

- (2) that since the membership of Mr R. Delahaye, Dr L. Marsden, Ms C. Richards and Dr T. Southon would end on 31 July 2014 and that the membership of the Standing Committee of the Assembly provided for 8 members elected by the Assembly, nominations were invited for the 4 vacancies from 1 August 2014 and four nominations were received. As a result no election is necessary and the four have been declared members of the Standing Committee of the Assembly, 1 August 2014 - 31 July 2017:

Ms Lucie Dack (FMH-LS) (S&C)
Mr R. Delahaye (SSF-LS)
Ms Natasha Gales (SCI) (S&C)
Ms Claudina Richards (LAW) (ATR)

- (3) for 2014/15 there would therefore be 5 members and 3 vacancies.

Subsequent to the agenda being issued a nomination form was received in respect of Mr Richard Delahaye. At the meeting Amanda Williams was nominated, seconded by Susan Sayce. There being no objections and no other nominations both Richard Delahaye and Amanda Williams were elected to serve on the Standing Committee of the Assembly for the period 1 August 2014 to 31 July 2017. This results in there being six members and two vacancies for the year 2014/15.

5. COUNCIL

Reported

that at its meeting on 24 June 2013 the Council noted the report of the Assembly dated 5 June 2013.

6. ITEMS PROPOSED

From Antje Kreutzmann-Gallasch (NBS)

Assembly is pleased to note that the difficulties regarding compliance with the early years funding scheme have been satisfactorily resolved. However, Assembly calls upon the University to give careful consideration to extending the opening hours of the nursery e.g. 8am-6pm to give working parents more flexibility and to support the Athena Swan aspirations of the University.

(The Vice-Chancellor acknowledged his pleasure that it had been possible to restore the Early Years funding for the Nursery. He acknowledged that the Nursery provision was important to the University, especially in supporting the Athena Swan process. It was confirmed that extending the opening hours as proposed would not be without cost and this would need to be the subject of further discussions and planning. In discussion it was asserted that there were also difficulties regarding the length of notice required to enable a child to enter the Nursery: this was a particular issue regarding the autumn term where notice was apparently required at Easter – significantly before academic staff would know their teaching timetable. The subject of “term-time” holidays was also cited as an issue with the policy appearing to charge parents for the period of absence

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if they removed their child from the Nursery for holidays during “term-time” and parents also being charged additional sums if they did not take holidays during “vacation periods”. In summary it was agreed that these issues would all be likely to impact the operating costs for the Nursery and the Vice-Chancellor invited ET-R to review opening times and the policies around holiday periods with a view to being as flexible as possible within financial boundaries. It was agreed that this review should take place as soon as possible during the 2014/15 academic year.)

From Katy Quigley (LTS – UEA Unison Equalities Officer)

The university’s charging policy for the car park is unfair and unequal. Unison UEA supports a review of the car parking charges and would welcome an equality impact assessment to be undertaken.

(It was asserted that there were some potential difficulties with the current practice of car park charging which potentially impacted part-time staff and those on lower incomes. There was particular concern that the cut-off point for a full day’s parking was four hours which meant that staff who worked four hours per day had to pay the full rate to ensure that they arrived and left on time. This was coupled with both an increase in the rate and an increase in the chargeable period. Concerns were also raised about the frequency with which barriers broke down, delays with clearing snow and ice in the winter and a lack of gritting. A counter-argument was presented from the floor stating that in comparison to the city centre car parking at the University was good value and also stating that at many employers based in industrial areas or business parks there is often a severe shortage of car parking and that overall the parking position at the University was a good deal. The Vice-Chancellor stated that a certain sum of money was required to operate the various car parks but also noted the need for an Equality Impact Assessment to be undertaken. It was noted that the next review of car parking was due imminently and, on that basis the Equality Impact Assessment should be incorporated into this review. If there were to be delays to the review then an Impact Assessment should be undertaken earlier.)

From Chris Hall (SSF) supported by Shaun Gibbs (SSF)

We understand that due to financial constraints, UEA has not been able offer more than a 1% pay rise to staff in recent years. However, to compensate for this can serious consideration be given to granting all staff a 60 minute lunch break instead of the current 45 minutes. This would then give staff sufficient time to use the Sports Park if they wanted to or pop into Norwich on occasions. The Sports Park have questioned why more staff don’t use their facilities over the lunch period and the simple answer is that staff can’t fit it into 45 minutes, especially if they work at the far end of Campus and have a long walk to get there and back again.

(The Director of Sport was present at the meeting and confirmed that the sessions the Sportspark run are of 40 minutes in length. The Vice-Chancellor confirmed that under the current system it is within managers’ discretion to allow colleagues to take a longer break at lunchtime and to make the time up either at the start or end of the day. He would also encourage all managers to operate this discretion wherever possible. He was also very conscious of the goodwill of all staff and that is it important to maintain this. The proposer reiterated that the primary point in her argument was that lower salary increases could, in part, be compensated by increasing the relevant lunch periods to one hour from the current 45 minutes. It was noted that this may increase overall costs to the University but there was a counter-argument that this additional fifteen minutes may well not impact on productivity and the work is likely to still get done. It was also stated that the University was looking at the possibility of allowing the salary sacrifice scheme to be used to support membership of the Sportspark. In summary, the Vice-Chancellor agreed to reinforce to managers a request that they be as flexible as possible regarding the existing lunch breaks and that ET-R would consider, during 2014/15 the wider issue of reward.)

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From Dr Spyros Themelis (EDU)

A UCU study published in 2012 based on a sample of 14,000 university workers, revealed very high and increasing stress levels among academics, underpinned by heavy workloads, a long hours culture and conflicting management demands. It also stated that academics experience higher stress levels than those in the wider population.

Assembly calls upon the university management to take active measures to monitor and protect the mental health of all UEA employees and to work towards the promotion of a working environment with low stress levels.

(The Vice-Chancellor acknowledged that for a long time academic staff in Britain had experienced raised stress levels. He also stated that it was the University's aim to provide a supportive and encouraging work environment to enable people to flourish and that he would encourage all interactions with colleagues to take place in a civilised manner, listening to each other and recognising that most people are working as hard as they can. From the floor it was pointed out that the Health and Safety Liaison Committee have looked at the absence statistics to identify, in the widest sense, absence that could be linked to stress and the current trend is downwards. There was some concern that these statistics may under-represent the issue as people are reluctant to identify stress as a cause of absence but it was confirmed that this was the reason why a wider group of data were reviewed.)

All of the above motions were carried.

7. QUESTIONS

Reported

that the following questions had been received and answers given below.

From Professor Alan Finlayson (PSI)

"In the most recent QS World Rankings of Universities nine subject areas at UEA were ranked within the top 200: Biological Sciences, Communication and Media Studies, Earth and Marine Sciences, Economics and Econometrics, English Language and Literature, Environmental Studies, Geography, Medicine and Politics.

This is an impressive achievement. The breakdown of the figures indicates just how impressive it is. For instance, the QS rankings show that Politics research at UEA receives more citations per paper than Politics research at Stanford and Yale; Media and Communications research at UEA has more citations per paper than at Yale; Earth and Marine Sciences research at UEA receives more citations per paper than Yale, University of Pennsylvania, UCLA and Oxford. Environmental Studies at UEA has a higher rate of citations per paper than UC Berkeley – ranked first for this subject area. The situation is similar all the UEA subject areas in the top 200 (and quite possibly for subject areas that fall just outside that top 200).

Yet in all these cases these subject areas fall far lower in the rankings than the data on their academic achievement would suggest. This is because, although scores indicating the quality and influence of our research are very high, our scores for "Academic Reputation" and "Employer Reputation" are miserable.

For instance, Media and Communications at UEA is held back by an employer reputation score of just 40.3. Economics and Econometrics scores very highly in citations but is let down by an employer reputation of just 39.5. Environmental studies has incredible citations scores (94) and a truly world class academic reputation (84.5) but its employer reputation is just 50.2. This figure

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undoubtedly keeps ENV out of the world top 10 (perhaps even from the number 1 spot). Geography has an employer reputation of 48.10 despite a rate of 97.8 for citations. In Politics a citations ranking that merits a top 20 position is held back by an employer reputation score of just 33.3.

In short, the evidence shows that the attainment of academic researchers at UEA is being let down by a failure on the part of the profession as a whole to recognize that UEA is a centre of world-class research. This is a matter that cannot be addressed by subject areas. It is an institutional problem.

The following questions thus arise:

What discussions have the Executive Team had about this problem?

What do members of the Executive Team think is the cause of this problem?

What has the Executive Team done to identify clearly the causes of this problem?

What plans are being developed to remedy this problem?

How does the Executive Team plan to assist subject areas in improving their academic reputation amongst their peers?

Answer:

Thank you for raising this very important issue. It is something which is very at the forefront of David Richardson's thinking and he raised the issue at the recent University Policy afternoon discussions. The QS league table and the Times Higher World rankings both have a large element of their overall scoring scheme that is based on reputation survey amongst academics (50% and 33% respectively). ET will be discussing internationalisation strategy (of which our academic reputation will be a key element) at its away day on 2 June. Ideas flowing from this and the policy day discussions will feed into the refreshing of the Corporate Plan in the autumn. There is a virtuous circle to complete: if UEA can enhance its profile amongst peers in other institutions then our citation scores should see us ride rapidly up the ranks of institutions nationally to match our standing in domestic league tables.

The other important aspect upon which you focus your question is employer reputation. The recent investment in employability and opening of CareerCentral is one very clear example of steps taken to enhance UEA's profile in this regard. It is a serious statement to visiting employers, particularly big multi-national companies, that UEA is serious about building its credibility with the employers who form part of the traditional 'milk round' (with all its associations with leading universities, especially Oxbridge). We are already seeing this new investment bear fruit with the notable growth in employers attending our careers' fairs, increases in the number and range of internships that we are able to offer and the work of the Associate Deans for Employability in the faculties. Such measures take time to filter through to opinion surveys, but we can be confident that there will be a positive impact on our standing in the future.