

School of Technology

Council of the School

2.00 p.m. on Friday, 26 November 2021

Meeting online via Zoom

UNRESERVED MINUTES

Present: Professor John Dennis (Chair)
Professor Richard Prager
Professor Clemens Kaminski
Professor Mauro Guillen

Professor Rodolphe Sepulchre
Professor Alastair Beresford
Professor Alexei Lapkin

Professor Andrew Flewitt
Professor Michael Sutcliffe
Professor Simon Guest
Professor Tim Minshall
Professor Richard Penty
Dr Patrick Barrie

Mr Matt Burgess (School Finance Manager)
Dr Ann Thompson (Research Strategy Facilitator)

In Attendance: Dr Daphne Ioannidis, Ms Tracy Brooks, Ms Isobel Cohen

Apologies: Professor Ann Copestake, Ms Clare Shine Professor
Holger Babinsky, Professor Simon Godsill, Dr Stella
Pachidi, Dr Shui Lam (Secretary)

Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

1. Minutes

The unreserved minutes of the meeting held on 22 October 2021 were approved.

Matters Arising

There were no matters arising other than those discussed under one of the following items.

Chair's Report

The Chair provided a verbal report.

Planning Round:

- The Chair thanked all who were involved in the planning meetings held between the School and the Departments, particularly for the effort in establishing the planned student numbers, that are subject to increased scrutiny from the Centre.
- The Chair advised that he expects the planning round to be challenging, as significant requests for investment from the UAS and UIS will make closing the structural deficit harder to achieve.

New Sources of Funds:

- The Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research has established a funding package to help with the recruitment, around £5m per year for the next 3 years, for start-up funding for senior professorial staff new to the University. The School will be able to apply up to £1m a year from this fund for start-up packages where there is a strong strategic case.
- There is a potential philanthropic donation worth USD100m from Mastercard to support selected African students to do the MPhil course in Cambridge and then to return home to meaningful positions, with mentoring throughout. Responses from Heads of Department regarding links their departments have with African countries have been passed to the Senior Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education.

Conflicts of Interest:

- The introduction of a new University Conflict of Interest Policy has meant that the Heads of Institution have been requested to formally declare any interests they have that may conflict with School business, which will be an ongoing annual process.
- The Chair confirmed that he has received the spreadsheet containing these declarations; he will convene a small group to review confidentially and manage in as light a touch process as possible. Following this review, the Chair will communicate formally with each Head of Institution regarding their declarations, to flag issues and actions regarding any declaration.

The reports from the Deputy Head of School and the Director of Education were attached in Paper **T/21/60**.

The Deputy Head of School provided the additional verbal updates:

- Recent RPC approval of SRI status for Quantum and Advance Materials Technologies for a Sustainable Society means that two out of the three recently approved SRIs have joint School leadership.

- The Elsevier contract consultation which established that Elsevier journals were of limited importance, and largely to particular Departments, who responded separately; this was useful in supporting the University's rejection of the original Elsevier offer. Elsevier have now responded with a much improved offer which is under consideration.
- The Deputy Head of School thanked all who were involved in making the first term of Decarbonisation Special Interest Group successful. School seed funding will help support the secretariat and activities prior to the establishment of an industry club to support the SIGs.
- Recently the University has not won as many large research grants compared to our peer institutions, presenting a reputational risk. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research has formed a Large Strategic Proposal Working Group to address relevant issues including how to provide support to PIs in developing large proposals, and in management of large awards.

Open research:

- The new UKRI Open Research Policy will come into effect in April 2022 so that all UKRI funded research must be published under a version of Gold open access. This is likely to cost the University £15m a year, with only £3M to £4M of this met by the UKRI.
- To reduce costs the University library is proposing that an author's version preprint is published on an open access University repository, much as the preprints on arXiv are made available in a manner acceptable to the journal in which a final version is ultimately published.

UKRI Funding:

- Funding from UKRI funding councils provides a substantial share of University research funding; in recent years the share of the University's award portfolio has reduced, leading to substantial cuts to key IAA and DTP funds that are allocated according to the University share of the EPSRC portfolio; longer term, it is expected that strategic equipment funding will correspondingly reduce.
- UKRI funding and peer review of competitive research awards is important for REF and other research excellence rankings; where the University used to be in the top 4, currently sits at number 10. Current EPSRC and Government assessments only count success with UKRI and UK Government awards, so are too narrow in scope to be reliable. Although this unreliability has been flagged by academic members of strategic panels, this has so far been ignored.
- Discussions included the importance of de-risking and diversifying the University funding portfolio. Questions were raised as to whether a better portfolio balance would be achieved by increasing other sources of funds, including those for PhD students, mitigating the risk of a declining UKRI sector share. It is thought unlikely that increased volumes from other funding sources will entirely make-up for significant losses in UKRI and

related awards; furthermore there are significant reputational risks associated with sustained loss of sector UKRI share. It was also noted that funding from other sources can come with a higher demand on PIs, many of whom have little further capacity to take on more grants.

Actions:

- The need for the University to review the balance of the research funding portfolio, as well as sources of PhD studentships will be fed into the Large Grant Working Group by the Deputy Head of School.
- The Head of School of the Physical Sciences and Technology will additionally raise issues with and seek advice from Professor Dame Lynn Gladden at an informal meeting.

The Director of Education provided a verbal update further to his report:

Information as to how the University is Widening Participation to PG students from diverse backgrounds is a key part of DTP and CDT funding applications. Pilot schemes are underway to establish how best the university can admit more WP students.

- £800,000 in funding, shared equally between the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford, has been secured to review PG admission processes and test alternative practices with the aim of improving admissions from widening participation backgrounds. The School is monitoring the outcomes of a pilot scheme in the Department of Chemistry to gather contextual information at the admissions stage.
- A further grant has been secured by the University to support non-Russell Group BAME undergraduates via mentoring and summer internship placements.

2. Starred Items

The Council of the School approved the starred items.

3. Strategic Business

3.1 Planning round 2021

At the meeting the Council of the School was asked to address a number of key questions regarding the School's 2021 planning submission, with all documents reviewed previously by the Strategy and Planning Committee.

As the submission was due on 3 December 2021, any significant changes to the papers should be flagged to the School as soon as possible.

3.1.1. Student number Planning

It was reported that the Director of Education consulted the Heads of Department over the planned student numbers over the five year planning period. Paper **T/21/61** summarises the undergraduate numbers already submitted the deadline of 9 November 2021.

Paper **T/21/62** summarises the postgraduate numbers with a deadline of 3 December 2021. The School has been asked to highlight the following areas, in its submission:

- Any material variances to planned student numbers for 2021-22, and mitigating actions that the School will take to bring numbers back in line with plans for 2022-23;
- Any material changes to plans for 2022-23 and 2023-24, and the reasons in each case;
- Progress towards the development, approval and implementation of new or significantly expanded courses;
- Risks and opportunities for doctoral studentship funding, including the timetable for, status of bids and renewals to UKRI DTP competitions. The report should address the steps that Schools are taking to manage these risks and opportunities, and indicate where further University-level action is required.

The Director of Education's proposed responses (**T/21/63**) to the questions were approved.

3.1.2. Postgraduate education: new courses and course fees

Paper **T/21/64** on fees proposed for home students and overseas students for 2022-23 and 2023-24, was approved on the recommendation of the Strategy and Planning Committee.

3.1.3. Research forecast

At the meeting, it was reported that in the past, research forecasts have been prepared individually by Schools, before being consolidated into a combined position on submission. This has been a time-consuming and inconsistent process which has not greatly improved the University's insight into high level research income trends. A different approach was being trialled during PR21 whereby research income trends were initially forecast in overview centrally by the University, based on its developing Ten Year Model. Schools can then inform and amend initial forecasts, in particular where there is specific local insight regarding the evolving mix of sponsor types over the forthcoming years.

Paper **T/21/65** summarises the School's initial research forecast prepared by the University, showing the forecast research sponsor mix, which have been reviewed

by Strategy and Planning Committee. The School Office identified emerging trends from available application and activation rate data, to inform the School's response. Adjustments to the initial forecasts would only be made where there was strong evidence of counter trends in sponsor mix, particularly as this year's planning exercise focused on the immediate 2022-23 financial year.

In addition, the Schools were asked to address the following key questions:

- What major new awards are planned for 2022-23 and 2023-24?
- What are the School's plans and expectations for funder mix in a changing research landscape, and are these accurately reflected in the current research assumptions?

The response, **Paper T/21/66**, to the questions, after consultation with the Head and the Deputy Head of School, was approved.

Key issues arose in the discussion to be fed back for Professor Dame Lynn Gladden.

- To help understand the University funding portfolio and funding trends it would be helpful to benchmark this against research funding data from peer Russell Group universities. Could a cooperative group be established across the Universities to provide peer benchmarking?
- How can the portfolio be diversified, and industry funding in particular increased?
- How is the University planning to mitigate the risk of potentially losing access to significant EU/EC research funding if the current political situation is not resolved?

3.1.4. Staffing Plan

In the planning round, Schools were asked to address the following key questions:

- any material changes to FTE and pay expenditure during 2022-23 and 2023-24, and the drivers (e.g. senior academic recruitment) in each case;
- Any exceptional resource requirements (e.g. to support senior academic recruitment) should be highlighted, together with the expected funding arrangements.

Most Departments informed the School of their detailed staffing plans at individual planning meetings which would be incorporated into the planning submission.

Since indicative allocations created no scope for increased Chest funding for posts beyond current steady-state levels, no further centrally funded staff requirements have been identified.

3.1.5. Estate Planning

Schools were asked to address any material changes resulting from the completion of major building projects, or from change projects identified via the “Reshaping our Estate” programme or as result of local estate plans.

The Judge expressed a wish to expand its estate, in due course, into the Browns restaurant and Engineering had plans to expand into the Roger Needham building once vacated. The plans were approved.

3.1.6. Chest Budgets

In view of the indicative nature of 2022-23 Chest budgets, the Committee approved the proposal to request a £600k increase for 2022/23, to remove any residual impact of 2021-22’s emergency reserves-based adjustment. Paper **T/21/67** sets out how this approach still leaves departments in the School facing a c£500k shortfall on its steady-state Chest funding commitments in 2022-23 which can be met by reserves. The School Finance Manager will liaise with Departments regarding allocation of the cuts and savings, and how to manage the deficit during Budget Round 2022.

It was noted that despite assurances at PRC that last year’s exceptional, reserves-based adjustment which disproportionately impacted the School’s Chest budget for 2021-22, would not be repeated in future years, the approach taken to setting indicative budgets for 2022-23 - averaging the last two years’ budgets - has to some extent locked-in the exceptional 2021-22 adjustment. This is the reason for the School’s proposed request to uplift indicative 2022-23 Chest budget, removing the historic link to a disproportionate adjustment in 2021-22. Some shortfall on Chest funds is expected in view of the University’s structural deficit position, but in view of the School’s net overall contributor position, its access to the block grant and student fee income it generates each year via Chest budgets, should at least hold-up relative to other Schools.

It was also noted that although members of Finance Committee have indicated support for responsible financial management through saving for the future, departmental and school reserves were now viewed increasingly negatively. The School has requested guidance from the centre as to appropriate management and constructive use of reserves in preference to these being used to support unsustainable deficits elsewhere in the University.

The Chair and Head of Department for Engineering are due to meet with the Director of Finance and Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Strategy and Planning to raise concerns about the evolving view of reserves held by schools and to confirm that last year’s exceptional reserves-based adjustment was a one off.

Concerns were raised about a University approach to Chest budget setting which risks conflating the question of excess reserves with the separate question of structural operating deficits; particularly where reserves are not held by the same institutions which contribute to the structural deficit. There are a number of issues to be addressed: ongoing reliance on reserves held by net contributor

Schools, risks perpetuating unsustainable operations in other areas of the University and depleting funds which might otherwise be used to invest in future income streams to help address the overall University funding position. Guidance on what the Centre sees as appropriate use of reserves has been requested.

The proposals in paper **T/21/67** were approved.

3.1.7. School Risk Register

As part of the planning submission, the School's risk register has been updated, comprising risk items which have all been approved by the relevant academic and administrative leads. All items have been previously approved by the relevant oversight committees named, except for item "School Infrastructure" for which the oversight body is the Council of the School.

At the meeting, the Council of the School approved the risk item "School Infrastructure", with the Head of School's dissatisfaction with the suitability of 17 Mill Lane as accommodation for the School Office noted. The Council approved the full School risk register.

4. Regular Business

4.1 MSt in Healthcare Innovation

The Department of Engineering proposed to create new part-time postgraduate courses (PgCert, PgDip and MSt) in Healthcare Innovation to expand their postgraduate teaching in this area. Associated with this would be new short courses to provide further teaching in this area which did not require School approval. The School's Postgraduate Education Committee considered and commented on the application for the award-bearing courses which did require School approval. Paper **T/21/69** contained the revised application, approved by the Faculty Board of Engineering on 15 November 2021. Paper **T/21/70** contained the business case for the full suite of courses (award-bearing postgraduate courses as well as non-award-bearing short courses).

The Director of Education supported the proposed courses but noted that the approval by the University was reliant on a separate application by the Department of Engineering to become an administering body for the award of PG Certificates and Diplomas.

The Strategy and Planning Committee considered the two papers and agreed the following:

- The proposal aligned with the strategic interest of the School, in growing the Healthcare-Engineering interface.
- The proposed student numbers were ambitious.
- The up-front investment required would be underwritten by the research group.

The Council of the School approved the proposal based on the recommendations of the Strategy and Planning Committee.

5. Straightforward Business

5.1 Health and Safety Matters

There were no Health and Safety matters to raise.

5.2 Risk Assessment

No decisions made at this meeting required any update to the Risk Register.

6. *Minutes of Other Committees**

Strategy and Planning Committee	16 November 2021	T/21/71
Postgraduate Education Committee	12 November 2021	T/21/72
Research Committee	18 October 2021	T/21/73
Undergraduate Education Committee	15 July 2021	T/21/74

7. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

8. Dates of Future Meetings 2021-22

2.00 p.m. Friday, 04 February 2022

2.00 p.m. Friday, 11 March 2022

2.00 p.m. Friday, 13 May 2022

2.00 p.m. Friday, 17 June 2022