

BISHOP GROSSETESTE UNIVERSITY

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
FINANCE, EMPLOYMENT & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

THURSDAY 6 JUNE 2019
10:00 AM IN HARDY SEMINAR ROOM 4

Present:

Mr Stephen Lawrence (SL)
AVM Gavin Mackay (Chair) (GM)
Rev'd Canon Professor Peter Neil (PN)
Rt Rev'd Dr Nigel Peyton (NP)

In attendance:

Mr Jonathan Batty, Director of Marketing, Recruitment & Communications (item 8 only) (JB)
Dr Rob Boast, Executive Dean of Learning & Teaching and Student Engagement (item 9 only) (RB)
Mr Jonathan Cheeseman, Director of Human Resources (JC)
Mr Stephen Deville, Chief Operating Officer (SD)
Mr John Duff, Health & Safety Manager (item 7 only) (JD)
Mr Alan Foster, Students' Union President 2018/19 (item 11 only) (AF)
Professor Scott Fleming, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (SF)
Ms Stephanie Gilluly, Registrar (Clerk) (SG)
Ms Suzanne Kane, Director of Estates & Facilities (item 6 only) (SK)
Ms Abigail Rogers, Students' Union Chief Executive Officer, (item 11 only) (AR)
Mr Barrie Shipley, Director of Finance (BS)
Mrs Emma Whiteley, Governance Officer (Minuting) (EW)

1. Welcome

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed members to the third FE&GP Committee meeting of the 2018/19 academic year. The new Head of Human Resources, JC was welcomed to his first meeting.

2. Apologies

- 2.1 Apologies for absence were received from Mr David Babb and Mrs Jackie Croft. AVM Gavin Mackay chaired the meeting in the absence of the Committee Chair, David Babb.

3. Declarations of Interest

- 3.1 There were no new declarations of interest received.

Action

4. Minutes of the last meeting held on 20 February 2019

- 4.1 The minutes of the FE&GP Committee meeting held on 20 February 2019 were APPROVED as a true record of the meeting, and the Chair was authorised to sign them.

5. Matters arising

5.1 Action table

- 5.1.1 Members NOTED the progress of actions set out in the action table of the aforementioned meeting produced by the Governance Office.

5.2 Any other matters

- 5.2.1 There were no other matters arising.

6. Estates

6.1 To receive a building works update

- 6.1.1 The Committee welcomed SK to the meeting. SK presented the building works update paper that monitored expenditure and commitment on capital estates projects and provided general estates information. The following points were HIGHLIGHTED:

- It was NOTED that work on energy management was progressing, costing around £10k, with a 5 year return on the payback.
- SK REPORTED on the work being undertaken in the Skinner Building where unsuitable working conditions had been identified. The work would bring staff together, providing co-located office accommodation that was compliant and fit for purpose. This work was sizable in terms of cost, coming in at around £200k including VAT. When added to the work in the Cornerstone Building and the Students' Union, the total cost would be circa £300k. Members NOTED that it made good sense to use the same contractor for all the work, and SD REPORTED that SK had brought the cost down from the original £500k. Some work was required from a compliance perspective, and experience would bring teams together to work more effectively. £350k had been budgeted for the work, so the cost was within the budget. The Committee NOTED that the work would be a good investment; there was cash in the bank and provision in the budget. Therefore, the work was provisionally AGREED, subject to the student recruitment forecast which was to be discussed later on the agenda.
- SK gave an update on the progress of studies into future opportunities for Sports, Health and Leisure provision, centred around potential developments to the sports hall. She would be meeting Mike Speakman, NHS Strategic Estates Advisor for

Lincolnshire, on the 11th June. Mike appeared very keen for the NHS to come into BGU and link in to Student Advice, health and wellbeing. The Committee gave encouragement for this work to be ongoing: it was only costing the University time at the moment and was developing communication with local authorities. Members congratulated SK on the good work.

6.1.2 SD REPORTED that the land development contracts were ready for signature and would be with us by the end of the week. We would be working to get our planning application in within 12 weeks.

6.1.3 SK circulated details on the HMRC Training Centre located at Lawress Hall, Riseholme Park, Lincoln, NOTING that the building was to be vacated by April 2021. The Senior Team had visited the site to look at the building and felt that it was a potentially exciting opportunity which would provide student accommodation and academic opportunities and had therefore lodged BGU's interest. SD REPORTED that the property came with a long term lease, and the land was owned by the University of Lincoln. It was REPORTED that the University of Lincoln might be open to us using the property; however, discussions were in the early stages. SD NOTED that we would continue to explore possibilities, keeping our options open, and would report back to the Committee on any developments.

SD

7. Health and Safety update

7.1 JD attended to provide a verbal update on health and safety, REPORTING that work was moving forward with all policies and procedures. JD REPORTED that the Bomb Policy had been put into practice in March, and gave details of the incident, which thankfully turned out not to involve a bomb. It was NOTED that the debrief had been very positive, and the authorities involved had confirmed that everything done had followed correct procedures.

7.2 JD REPORTED that next term there would be up to five guide dogs on campus and a policy had been developed that should be in place for September.

7.3 JD REPORTED on the accident figures, NOTING that a check had been done on the past three years, going back to 2016. Figures were lowest for 2017/18, with two more accidents being recorded this year.

7.4 It was NOTED that certain concerns raised by students regarding safety in Crosstrend House had not been followed up by the management company. JD REPORTED that he and the Accommodation Manager, Rachel Crane, had attended to do an independent check on the property and SK followed this up by bringing in the management company to raise their concerns. The outcome was that the management company were given four weeks to do the work before rent was withheld. JD REPORTED that he had been back to the property and work had started. They would be meeting with the management company again next week.

7.5	JD REPORTED that a fire door survey started as a result of the initial inspection had been done, and he was waiting for all reports to come back. A fire safety training package had been designed and would be rolled out in July. It was NOTED that some risk assessment training had also taken place.	
7.6	JD REPORTED that the future focus on health and safety was to continue to develop policies and procedures, identify staff training and maintain a robust audit programme. NP asked that JD look into a risk assessment of the Chapel. The Committee thanked JD for a very useful update.	JD
8.	To receive an update on student recruitment	
8.1	JB attended to present the update on student recruitment. It was HIGHLIGHTED that there was a need to shorten the journey from someone showing an interest in BGU to being offered a place (if appropriate). JB REPORTED that the extra £100k for marketing had resulted in more hits into the website, and the aim was to get more brand awareness and reach out so that our name was "out there". When performance was compared to last year it showed that total visitor numbers to the website were down. However, far more people were going on into the programme pages, with 64k additional hits being recorded. The bounce rate was also down by 21%, which showed people were staying and spending time on the page, and going on to view multiple pages. Members agreed that the website was getting people in, but not transferring that into applications. JB REPORTED that an agency was coming in to work with him to implement pop-ups.	
8.2	It was NOTED that Open Day bookings were down, and that we ask for a lot of information from prospective visitors. JB REPORTED that there was a need to split test to see whether asking for less information might improve take-up. Enquiries were up by 393, and we had to wait and see if there would be a rise in people actually attending.	
8.3	JB REPORTED that we were trying to pull back into our recruitment region and had identified 10 schools to work with. If these schools met the required criteria, they would be offered two MA places free of charge. It was hoped that this would lead to an increase in applications. It was also hoped that the discussion on fees would help to attract high attaining students.	
8.4	SL NOTED that the analysis provided by JB was excellent and the conversion rate was still very good, but we needed to see how much more we could squeeze, showing students what the benefits for them were. Making fee-waiver scholarships attractive was also something to be wrapped up. There was a whole layer of things to look at, such as key investment areas where we think we can get a return, and fully committing to certain areas. JB HIGHLIGHTED the need to work on the conversion rate, finding out where the students who did not come here ended up, and why they had not chosen BGU. The Committee thanked JB for his update and ongoing work.	

9. Access and Participation Plan

- 9.1 RB attended to present the Access and Participation Plan, NOTING that it had been hoped to have an initial first draft at this point; however, it had proven more complicated than first thought. What was presented to the Committee was a preview of what Council would be getting in the following few weeks with key points and the opportunity to challenge some of the decisions.
- 9.2 GM NOTED that the plan would benefit all students and was entirely on the right track. The Committee ENDORSED the outline of the plan to date, and thanked RB for all his work and a very helpful presentation.

10. Finance

10.1 To note and consider the mid-year financial forecasts and 2019/20 budget

- 10.1.1 BS presented the mid-year financial forecasts and 2019/20 budget, REPORTING on the deficit of £750k which was down from the forecast £823k due to the retention of students being slightly worse than forecast.
- 10.1.2 Following Council's approval of the Voluntary Leavers Scheme, it was REPORTED that 27 members of staff had applied for the scheme, with 19 of these applications being approved. These staff members had until the 14 June to officially confirm whether they are accepting, and to date 13 of the 19 had confirmed their acceptance.
- 10.1.3 BS REPORTED that the 2019/20 budget set out assumptions, including some key ones around student recruitment, which was unfortunately slightly down from February. This had been offset by some proposals regarding Higher and Degree High Apprenticeships. It was NOTED that, from a cost perspective, the budget was very lean and the assumptions for applications to offers to acceptances were pessimistic. The forecast deficit was £1.1m, which was down from £1.6m. Capital spend had been kept to a minimum, with the intention to try and protect our cash base as much as possible. BS REPORTED that some crucial capital expenditure for IT had been built in, as well as the land development plan. There was an assumption that we would be loan borrowing, and a 1% bank loan had been assumed. However, this would need to be revisited in 12 months.
- 10.1.4 The Committee NOTED the revised 2018/19 forecast out turn and also NOTED that for 2019/20 the budget was the best that it could be in the circumstances, and that for 2020/21 static recruitment based on 2019/20 had been built in. It was also NOTED that a workload model review to look at how we are best utilising staff resources would take place. The Committee RECEIVED and APPROVED the 2019/20 budget position, NOTING that it would be revisited in October once we had finalised student numbers. Forecasts for future years would be considered at the November Council meeting.

10.1.5 The Committee NOTED the need to maintain a positive cash position over the next few years and ENDORSED that the estates work previously reported to the Committee by SK under the building works update (6.1.1) could move forward.

10.1.6 The Committee NOTED that £5k had been agreed for the Disbursement Committee's funding proposal. SL REPORTED that the Disbursement Committee would ensure that all information on how the money was spend would be provided.

10.2 Student Fee Policy

10.2.1 It was REPORTED that, following an internal audit review, most fees would be capped at £9,250, with MA increasing by the international level of 2%. It was NOTED that the resit fee would be increased from the current charge of £25. With the actual cost to BGU being in excess of £800, the Committee AGREED to NOTE to Council that the paper recommended an increase fee of £650.

Chair

10.2.2 The student experience around accommodation was NOTED. The Committee discussed the potential of offering contracts of varying duration to improve the student experience. Accommodation charges were approved for 2019/20 and would not be increased by more than 5%. The Committee AGREED to RECOMMENED the Student Fee Policy to Council.

Chair

10.3 To receive an update on BG (Lincoln) Ltd.

10.3.1 SD REPORTED on the cost pressures, NOTING that the current year subsidy would meet the needs of the Limited Company. Concerning the student experience, the importance of creating an environment that students wanted to be part of was NOTED. It was REPORTED that there were some questions on what it was the Limited Company wanted to do to make that happen, and despite current subsidy levels they would likely require some initial help. A relatively low pay increase for staff was REPORTED, noting that there had not been a pay increase for the past four years.

10.4 To receive an update on pensions

10.4.1 SD presented the sector update paper from UCEA and NOTED the proposed changes in the LGPS. The proposal was more of a phased bill, and potentially universities could choose not to offer the LGPS. It was AGREED that we might want to revisit this if the sector starts to do this. It was NOTED that contributions into USS may go up to around 24%, and since this would affect only a handful of BG staff, our input into the decision would be minimal. SD would keep the Committee updated.

SD

10.5	SU block grant	
10.5.1	SD REPORTED on the Students' Union block grant proposal and proposed that it not be agreed at present. The Committee NOTED that the SU had a fair amount of money in the bank and considered that they should first look at their own cost base. It was NOTED that in 2015 the SU had 5 members of staff at a cost of £91k and now had 9 members of staff at a cost of £127k. The administration costs at Newman University were NOTED as being lower with more students. The Committee considered that the SU's situation mirrored that of the University, who were having to cut staffing costs, and therefore the SU should look to do the same. It was NOTED that BG needed to consider what we wanted from the SU, but, whilst sympathetic in part, the Committee AGREED to not increase the grant. The Committee AGREED that the SU should look at their cost base and come back to the Committee with a new proposal.	SD
11.	Students Union	
11.1	To receive an update from the Students' Union	
11.1.1	AF and AR attended for this item and the Chair welcomed AF as the new Students' Union President for 2019/20. The SU President's report was RECEIVED and the Committee RECORDED their appreciation to the 2018/19 President and Vice-President, NOTING the steady rise in student engagement.	
11.1.2	The Chair outlined the decision by the Committee on the SU block grant, NOTING the need for them to demonstrate that they had been through the finances thoroughly, looking at areas (such as staffing) where they could make savings, before coming back to the Committee with a proposal.	AF/AR
11.2	To note the SU draft budget	
11.2.1	AR REPORTED on the SU draft budget, NOTING very little movement other than staffing and pension costs. It was another deficit budget and they were working with the NUS to address issues. Everything else was REPORTED as fairly static. The Committee thanked the SU for the report and budget.	
12.	Employment	
12.1	An update from the new Director of HR	
12.1.1	JC, the new Director of HR, REPORTED on his plan to revamp the appraisal system, NOTING that he would be looking to introduce an online appraisal system and would be meeting with iTrent to discuss 360 degree appraisals, which were invaluable in making a full analysis of performance.	

- 12.1.2 JC REPORTED that employee engagement would form a key part in the staff survey and stated his intention to start a working group as well as a 'you said, we did' scheme. It was also NOTED that other survey providers would be explored for future surveys.
- 12.1.3 It was REPORTED that the Voluntary Leavers Scheme process had gone well, with 6 members of staff still to accept. JC NOTED that he would be meeting with 3 of those later that day, and it was hoped that all acceptances would be signed off by the end of the week.
- 12.1.4 JC REPORTED that all HR policies were out of date and unfit for purpose. It was NOTED that he had already been through five policies which were with SD for approval.
- 12.1.5 JC NOTED how impressed he was by the HR staff, NOTING that they had been well managed by BS prior to his arrival. JC REPORTED that HR basics needed to be right, including policies, contracts and structure. He considered that iTrent was an excellent HR system that BG were not currently utilising fully. JC NOTED that he had already met with the Director of IT to look at adding online appraisals, and it was important that we moved to a system that captured what has and is happening.
- 12.1.6 JC NOTED that he had identified that some management capability was poor and NOTED HR master classes to assist managers. It was NOTED that VCEG and Director level capabilities were very good; however, a toolkit for middle level managers was necessary, as well as identifying and meeting training needs.

12.2 To receive the HR workforce report

- 12.2.1 The Committee RECEIVED the HR workforce report, NOTING the 0.2% reduction in BAME staff, 1% increase in staff with disabilities and a 17.91% staff turnover which would significantly increase due to the Voluntary Leavers Scheme. The main reasons for staff leaving were to achieve promotion and/or better pay elsewhere. A 1.12% reduction in staff sickness was also NOTED.

12.3 Policies

- 12.3.1 The Committee NOTED the Hate Crime Policy. SG would take the recommendations provided by Jackie Croft back to the Head of Student Advice, the Policy's Owner/Author, to be added accordingly, and for the paper to be tidied up and approved.

SG

13. Agenda suggestions for future meetings

- 13.1 Members AGREED the following item should be covered on its next agenda:

- HR policies

JC

14. Agenda management & review

- 14.1 Members NOTED that, given the extent of the Agenda and the need to devote sufficient time to consider and discuss several weighty topics, it was inevitable that the meeting would over-run somewhat. They appreciated the Chairman's re-ordering of some Agenda items according to their priority and the time available, and considered that a good balance had been struck, enabling clear briefings and constructive discussions.

15. Any other business

- 15.1 Members NOTED that it was the last meeting for BS, who would be leaving BGU for pastures new. The Committee NOTED their appreciation for all his work and wished him well in his new role. The clarity of his presentations and explanations was applauded.

16. Key items for University Council

- 16.1
- Land update
 - To note the Access and Participation Plan review
 - Budget
 - Student Fee Policy
 - Staff Survey
 - Hate Crime Policy

17. Date of next meeting

- 17.1 The next meeting of the FE&GP Committee would take place on Tuesday 5 November at 11:00 am in Hardy Seminar Room 1 and would be followed by the joint FE&GP/Audit Committee lunch meeting at 1:00 pm in Hardy Seminar Room 2.

Signed

J. Roberts

Date

5/11/19

