

## HARPER ADAMS UNIVERSITY

### Staff Meeting

#### Minutes of the Staff Meeting held on 28 April 2017 in the Foulkes-Crowther Lecture Theatre

**Attendance:** a record of all staff who attended is held in the University Secretary's Office, together with a record of apologies received.

#### 16/06 **Welcome**

The Vice-Chancellor welcomed new staff to their first staff meeting.

#### 16/07 **Minutes**

Agreed: the minutes of the Staff Meeting held on 19 September 2016 (16/01-16/05).

#### 16/08 **Matters Arising**

Noted:

- i) that thanks were due to all staff who had kindly provided examples of good teaching practice, which could be submitted to TEF. These examples had proved very useful and had been included in the submission.
- ii) that the University had engaged actively with discussions around BREXIT. In particular, the University had encouraged any members of staff who had particular personal concerns about BREXIT to talk to the HR Department and/or provide details of their concern to their Line Manager, so that general feedback could be passed on to the relevant Higher Education representative bodies at national level.

#### 16/09 **Presentation from the Vice-Chancellor**

Noted:

- i) that the Vice-Chancellor's presentation would be made available to all staff on the University Portal following the meeting;
- ii) that the presentation focussed on performance in terms of Student Recruitment, Finance, Institution Specific Funding, BREXIT, HE/Other Government policies, Estates Development and HE Sector competition.
- iii) that live applicants to Harper Adams for September 2017, are currently running at 94% of the number of applications received at the same point in 2016. The number of applications has grown steadily over the year and reinforces the national picture where potential applicants are taking their time in making decisions about whether or not to apply to University. At national level, UCAS has indicated that the sector is about 5% down in terms of UG applications
- iv) that in light of the above, student recruitment remains key. Agriculture and engineering courses appear to be particularly challenged at the current time and it is recognised that agriculture in particular, may be affected by BREXIT and domestic farming policy changes, as well as the wider reduction in applications affecting all courses/HEI's
- v) that competition from competitors remains extremely high. It was therefore important to make every effort to capture the very best students. Thanks were due to staff who have developed new

and innovative programmes including Applied Biology and Zoology, which it was hoped would broaden the appeal of opportunities to study at Harper Adams, to a wider group of students.

- vi) that steps had been taken in discussion with Academic Staff to restructure Open Days, starting with the next Open Day on 13 May. Particular thanks were expressed also to all staff who have worked hard to develop the new approach and to those staff who were engaged in ensuring that the campus looks at its best on this occasion.
- vii) that the proposal to introduce a new logo had been problematic, however the aim remained to reach out to a wider audience of potential applicants. After discussions with current students, it had been agreed that the full Coat of Arms would be used around the Campus. This had become easier as the University had recently received formal confirmation from the College of Arms that the ownership of the Crest had been transferred to Harper Adams University. The new logo was being used on new applicant materials and information aimed at new applicants. So far visitors at the University stands at UCAS fairs had increased by 100% compared to the previous year and therefore, it appeared that the campaign was proving to be attractive to potential students.
- viii) that the University has performed extremely well at national level during the year, including winning three major titles; "WhatUni" Student Choice University of the Year, the Times Higher Student Experience Survey No. 1 and Modern University of the Year. It was understood that Harper Adams is the first University to achieve all three awards at the same time.
- ix) that the "Complete University Guide" had recently been published. Harpers Adams had retained its position and had improved its subject performance in most areas. Nevertheless, it remained very competitive to maintain a position within these publications.  
For example, while Harper Adams had improved its overall score, this had been mirrored by other institutions and therefore its place in the table remained at 46<sup>th</sup>.
- x) that the University had also entered the QS World University Rankings Table for the first time and had been placed in the 251-300<sup>th</sup> bracket of Agricultural Universities. This was important as international students are increasingly seeking confirmation that the University is recognised in such publications. Thanks were due to all staff who had helped identify key contacts globally, who would be willing to provide information about the work of the University.
- xi) that the student response rate to the National Student Survey, had increased 82.7% and was well above the National Average of 66.6%. Thanks were due to all staff in their help in encouraging students to take part in this survey, which remained very important in respect of not only League Tables, but the Teaching Excellence Framework and overall communications with wider stakeholders. Particular thanks were also expressed to staff who had all worked very hard to ensure that students

remained at the heart of the University's activities and were provided with the very best experience.

- xii) that with regard to degree completions, the University's performance had fallen back slightly and this would be considered further, so that actions could be taken as required. It was also noteworthy, that the University's facility spend was likely to fall slightly in future years, as major construction projects draw to a close and the University invests at a more modest level in refurbishment etc. The HESA Group would be looking at this carefully and would consider how other measures will need to compensate for the changes in facilities spend.
- xiii) that the UK population demographic dip was continuing and it remained important for the University to seek well qualified International students including those from the EU where possible, to help balance student numbers. It was noted that in a recent Hobson International Student Survey, factors which influenced international student choice included; high quality teaching, high student satisfaction, graduate employment, well qualified teaching staff, a gold rating in the TEF/ high ranking in key publications such as League Tables and affordable tuition fees. The University was in a reasonable position to demonstrate success in these factors.
- xiv) that the House of Commons has recently published the HE Bill and it was currently awaiting ascent of the House of Lords.
- xv) that retaining Tier 4 Licences remained challenging, especially for smaller Institutions. One Institution had recently lost its Licence due to problems with only two international applicants. A particular challenge in relation to this, was that the percentage threshold remains the same no matter how many students a particular University is registering from overseas countries and therefore those Universities with smaller numbers of international students were particularly vulnerable to losing their Licence if problems arose. All staff were thanked for their cooperation in working with Laura Harper and other staff, who were doing their best to ensure that the University maintained its position with regard to Tier 4.
- xvi) that with respect to the University's finances, it was currently anticipating a 3.28% surplus at the Year End. Its goal remained to achieve 5% annually, however this remained challenging.
- xvii) that due to the recent General Election announcement, the Grant Letter information for all UK HEI's was now under an extended embargo until 9 June 2017. It was not possible therefore to share this information with staff, although it was noted that there would be a cut to funding, as there would be for other Universities. It would therefore be necessary for Harper Adams to take steps to reduce costs carefully, so that reasonable surpluses could be achieved to continue investing in the University's future and student and staff experience. If necessary, careful consideration may need to be given to whether or not staff who may be leaving during the year, can be fully replaced where overall student numbers are likely to fall behind those achieved in previous years

- xviii) that the University recognises that staff are working extremely hard. It wishes to support staff and help everyone maintain a high level of performance. In this regard, it was important that everybody contributed and played an active role in supporting each other to continue to deliver high quality student experience. In summary, while the University was not in a very difficult position, it nevertheless needed to ensure that it remained prudent, met its student requirement targets and maintained performance, in addition to trimming costs where necessary.
- xix) that the overlapping of the academic year and fiscal year tends to lead to late Grant announcements and it was recognised that this is challenging and means that in-year cuts are often related to this factor and can be challenging to manage in the short period to Year End.
- xx) that it has been alleged that there continues to be a perception amongst some officials that Universities are 'awash with cash'. It was important therefore to encourage key decision makers to visit the University and to understand the position of small specialist institutions and the challenges that they faced. Ten Treasury Officials had agreed to visit the University and a date was currently being confirmed.
- xxi) that the University had been successfully implementing its strategy with regard to investing the Institutional Specific Funding that had been secured. Thanks were due to all staff for their engagement with the "DELTA" Project and also to the Estates Team, who had already started to implement improvements to learning and teaching spaces identified by staff and students in recent focus groups.
- xxii) that two chairs in Precision Farming Economics were now being filled thanks to support from the Elizabeth Creak Charitable Trust. The new post in Sub-Saharan African Agriculture had also been successfully filled, together with the appointment of a new business development lead and a Deputy Registrar.
- xxiii) that the ISF plan to improve security infrastructure 1st Phase had also been implemented and the modest uplift to the SU Subvention had taken place. The SU were continuing to offer and develop further activities aimed at providing a wider range of social activities to all students.
- xxiv) that the plan to seek match funding from ESIF to support the development of an AgriTech Acknowledge Exchange Team had been successful and appointments were currently underway. The International Marketing Campaign had also been implemented and some of the plans to invest in infrastructure had also been completed, including upgrades to one section of Boughey Hall over the Easter, with further work to be done over summer 2017.
- xxv) that Andy Wilcox had developed an application to UK Aid, focussing on developing Higher Education in Sub-Saharan African countries. AGCO were very supportive of this proposal and had also recently asked the University to help support a Kenyan University, in addition to the work it was already doing in Zambia.

- xxvi) that in conjunction with AGCO, Paula Misiewicz and Sven Peets had also recently secured an AgriTech Catalyst fund bid, which would see £160,000 made available to the University for systems integration, focussing on Sub-Saharan African farming systems.
- xxvii) that the new business development lead, Claire Keegan, was undertaking a significant amount of work to take forward the Universities engagement with apprenticeships, as well as a wide range of business contacts and policy making bodies, such as the Midlands Engine.
- xxviii) that Charles Cowap and others, including Professor Brian Revell had been working on the University's engagement with BREXIT. In particular, Professor Revell had been actively contributing to DEFRA and other Government workshops, including running a master class on trade negotiations. Recent announcements had confirmed that EU student loans would continue for those students entering UK universities in 2018/19 and the University continued its work in trying to influence other relevant policies that are likely to affect HEI's via GuildHE, as its representative body and through other engagement with key policy makers.
- xxix) that an independent review of TEF including in particular, data being used for the exercise had been announced. It was further also understood that there could be important ministerial changes post-election, whether or not the Conservative Party is re-elected as the Government.
- xxx) that the Vice Chancellor had actively engaged with the consultation for the industrial strategy and had highlighted in particular that the strategy made little or no mention of AgriTech Industries.
- xxxi) that the University's engagement with the current Minister Andrea Leadsom had been fruitful. She had made comments to a number of audiences about how impressed she had been during her visit to Harper Adams University.
- xxxii) that Professor Simon Blackmore had been invited to give evidence to The House of Lords Committee on the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund. He had successfully persuaded the Committee not simply to focus on autonomous cars and similar vehicles but to recognise the importance of autonomous vehicles and drones, as well as satellite technology that could be Council applied to food production in agriculture.
- xxxiii) that the University working with Telford and Wrekin Council, had managed to secure £9m for the Newport Innovation Park, which it was understood was likely to be open during 2018/19. An engagement with the Newport Regeneration Partnership was due to take place the following week, where this would be explored further.
- xxxiv) that it remained important to engage with the Midland's Engine Proposals, where the University of Lincoln was currently leading on 'food processing'. Harper Adams continued to press the case for AgriTech and Agriculture.

- xxxv) that an opportunity to influence BEIS officials had arisen recently, when the Regional Director had visited the University. She had been briefed on the University's AgriTech Cluster Strategy and she had confirmed that the concept of 'place' remains key, so in her view, the Cluster proposal would be very positive and would engage well with the Government's Strategy. She had been particularly impressed with the 'hands free hectare' and had indicated that she wished to bring further officials to visit the University in due course.
- xxxvi) that an article published in Nature, had talked positively about the work of the Agricultural Engineering Department at Harper Adams and thanks were due to Simon Blackmore and Richard Green in particular, for their engagement with this important aspect of farm robotics.
- xxxvii) that with respect to Estates Developments, The Elizabeth Creek Building/new laboratories would be formally opened on the 7 June 2017. The AgriEpi Innovation Centre and the Smart Dairy were also due to be completed during May/June 2017. Thanks were expressed to all staff for their patience with the STEP Project, which had proved particularly challenging and it was hoped that this would be drawing to a close in the near future.
- xxxviii) that the Vice Chancellor of the Royal Agricultural University had visited Harper Adams prior to Easter.
- xxxix) that a new Vice Chancellor had been appointed to University College Writtle and he would also be invited to visit Harper Adams in due course.
- xxxx) that SRUC had recently published a new strategic plan, which set out considerable ambitions to join up with plans to develop further agriculture courses at Edinburgh University. The overall aim in the plan was for SRUC to be in the Top 6 Agricultural Institutions in the world.
- xxxxi) that all staff were thanked for their engagement with the new MYHA HR/payroll system. Thanks were also expressed to the Project Team and Nick Gallagher-Hughes for the training sessions that had been offered. Further sessions would be available and all staff were reminded to ensure that they downloaded any information from the previous online payslip system, before the end of April.
- xxxii) that the anticipated review of HEIF funding had not unfortunately taken place. Despite this, a recent announcement of a new HEIF Fund of £100m had been made. This fund was entitled, 'Connecting Capability' and would provide a 10% uplift for all Universities who currently received HEIF and would enable those same Universities to bid for projects of between £3m and £5m out of a total of £85m allocation. Unfortunately, as Harper Adams was not in receipt of HEIF, it would not be eligible to lead on bids or to receive the 10% uplift. Representations were being made given the University's very strong track record in working with the industry, as it was extremely disappointed that the much anticipated review had not taken place.

16/10 **Questions**

- i) It was noted that short course/conference activity did not appear to be quite as busy over the Easter vacation. It was acknowledged that short courses had in fact met their targets, whereas some aspects of conferencing had reduced and this was currently being looked at carefully. The short course and conference office continued to look carefully at repeat bookings and where these did not occur, to understand why this might be the case and to attract new business wherever possible.
- ii) in response to a question about the focus of the Newport Innovation Park and the University's likely role in relation to the park, it was noted that the Local Authority will be managing the site construction and were seeking support from the University, with regard to encouraging Universities to relocate to the new park and/or start up new businesses in the park. The Local Authority had a very good track record on inward investment. It was also possible that the park might provide useful space for student spin-out companies in future, as well as those companies who could offer crossover technology that would support agriculture applications. In addition to this, inward investment from International businesses was also being sought and the University had, for example, recently engaged with one Indian tractor manufacturer and a second one would be visiting in the near future. All staff were encouraged to put forward any ideas about companies that they might be engaging with, who could have an interest in relocating or developing a branch of their business at the Newport Innovation Park.

**ALL**

- iii) in answer to a question about the role of the NCOP (National Collaboration Outreach Programme,) it was confirmed that this had been developed building on previous years' park activity. The University was in an NCOP Partnership with Keele and other Universities. Simon Pride and the newly recruited NCOP Team were actively leading on this agenda and would be specifically widening participation activities with relevant school to try and improved the performance of their students throughout school and during any higher level studies at University. It was noted in particular that there are opportunities for staff to engage with the 'Big Bang/STEAM' planned for early July. The budgets currently would enable purchase of equipment, whereas this may not be available in future years and therefore all staff were encouraged to contact Simon Pride if they wish to get involved

16/11 **Date of Next Meeting**

18 September 2017 at 0915