

Council, 5 November 2003 Agendum 10 : Strategic Planning

It is hoped that a general discussion will be possible on the direction in which the university should develop over the next few years. This will be informed by the *Planning Issues* paper and the attached note on the Financial Strategy (which is an updated version of a paper prepared for the Planning Group Away Day in July).

The context in which we operate is an external environment which often restricts our room for manoeuvre and which is increasingly competitive. The resource base from which we start is the culmination of past performance over many years. Selectivity in research funding and the consequences of the new fees structure will be of particular significance in the medium term.

The following are some of the issues that we must address in the near future.

- (i) A primary aim must be to ensure that the improvement in the financial position is sustained. Only then can we initiate new developments and fulfil our declared mission.
- (ii) In order to achieve the required financial stability we must protect our present income streams and develop new ones.
- (iii) Are we too small to be really competitive? If so how do we grow?
- (iv) In an intensely competitive environment we must enhance and widen our portfolio of undergraduate courses. This requires investment, and consequently the redirection of resources, themselves more or less fixed. Given that new academic subjects inevitably are created over time and that others diminish in importance and/or popularity, (1) what areas should we develop? (2) what new subjects should we consider? (3) should we withdraw from others?
- (v) In the context of attracting more applications and addressing other priorities, what more can we do to widen participation from (1) under represented groups, (2) ethnic minorities, (3) students from Wales ?
- (vi) How can we develop the provision of Welsh medium courses, and, more importantly perhaps, the take up of such courses?

- (vii) The proposed fee structure in England will increase the income of universities substantially. If a new fee structure is introduced in Wales, what will be our policy on the level of fees for undergraduate courses? If they are not – and in the interim when English universities will be allowed to charge such fees and we are not – how can we compete with universities outside Wales?
- (viii) We have too few postgraduate students. How can we improve our performance in increasing the number and quality of postgraduates following (1) taught programmes, (2) research degrees. We currently fund about a half of our research students ourselves; increasingly Research Council studentships are associated with research grant income, and consequently affected by the increasing selectivity of research funding.
- (ix) Research performance : we are currently revising our research strategy. We urgently need to improve the quality of research and to increase external research income, from the Research Councils, EU sources, charities and industry. How do we accomplish this? What level of increase is realistic?
- (x) Issue (ix) is central to our future as an HE institution. What kind of university do we see ourselves in five years time? For example, what expectations should we have of academic staff in terms of research?
- (xi) In order to achieve some of the goals in relation to the above, do we have an appropriate structure? Is our approach to the distribution of resources sensible?
- (xii) How can we increase our income from third mission activities?
- (xiii) One of the most important issues to be considered is our approach to collaboration and reconfiguration. There is obviously a political imperative, but we must enter into such discussions only if it is of benefit to us. One of our greatest challenges is to formulate a clear strategy in relation to the necessity to collaborate : to achieve economies of scale, to improve competitiveness and to strengthen performance, particularly in research. The questions, then, are : how, when, and with whom?
- (xiv) We have an unacceptably high level of backlog maintenance; this presents major risks to us. How can we make inroads into it? We

also need to consider our overall estates strategy: how do we achieve a better match of space to requirements? As an example, should we rationalise our portfolio of buildings?

NGL
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