

## **Questions on the Green and White Papers and the academic restructuring proposal**

### **A. Overall process**

1. Why did the precursor to the Green Paper S/215/5, 'Describing the preferred future', go to Council on 22nd-23rd November before going to Senate on 5th December, and the Green Paper to Council on 22nd January before going to Senate on 14th March? Why was two days given to the Council discussion of S/215/5 and its ancillary documents but less than an hour to Senate's?
2. Can the University community have an assurance that, in future, all significant papers will go to Senate before they go, in the same form, to Council?

### **B. Teaching expansion areas and internal resource transfer**

3. Given that according to the Charter and Statutes Senate's first function is to 'direct and regulate the instruction and teaching within the University', why was Senate not presented with a document outlining the procedure for identifying and risk-assessing teaching expansion areas before the procedure was set in motion and working groups were set up?
4. The draft White Paper, appendix 1, names eight possible teaching expansion areas, but it includes reports from only five. It states that the reports from the other three will be available shortly and that after a period for comments the working groups will reconvene to revise their reports and send them to the VCEG for approval. By what procedure will a final decision be made about which of these teaching expansion areas to pursue? What role, if any, will the University Teaching and Learning Committee have in this procedure? What role will Senate have?
5. Can Senate be assured that any decisions about hiring new faculty in order to teach in teaching expansion areas will not be made until the decision about which of these areas to pursue has been approved by Senate?
6. The Green Paper (paras. 71, 99) states that to expand Business and Management Studies and achieve a planned increase of 465 non-HEFCE-funded home/EU students it will be necessary to transfer resources away from other disciplines, leading to a loss of 23 staff posts in these disciplines unless they can generate alternative sources of income. Which areas does the VCEG think will be affected by these transfers? How will these areas be enabled to generate alternative sources of income? Or is a programme of voluntary or compulsory redundancies planned in these areas?
7. Has market research and risk assessment been done for each of the eight possible teaching expansion areas? In particular, how have the risks associated with the fact that in some cases we are many years behind established providers been assessed? Has the possibility been considered that we would do better to invest in and expand our teaching provision in areas in which we already recruit strongly and have a national reputation, rather than to move into new areas in which we have neither?
8. Given the great uncertainty over Sussex's ability to attract international fee-paying students, evidenced by the serious fall in applications from such students this year, is the White Paper dangerously reliant on the expectation of substantial increases in the numbers of such students to these teaching expansion areas?

### **C. Research themes**

9. How long does the VCEG expect the chosen set of research themes to last? Are they expected to be replaceable after 3-5 years, or to identify the University for, say, the next 10 years? If the former,

then how can such rapidly changing themes be expected to express Sussex's long-term identity? If the latter, then how is this consistent with the aim of choosing themes that are included in the strategic objectives of the Research Councils, since these change regularly?

10. Is the VCEG aware that other British universities are also branding themselves with research themes that reflect current UK Research Council strategic priorities? Has it considered the danger that by doing the same it will make itself less, rather than more, distinctive?
11. The Research Councils themselves are coming under fire for adopting strategic priorities dictated by government political interests or narrow calculations of economic benefit (see for example <<http://education.guardian.co.uk/higher/research/story/0,,2257830,00.html>>, Education Guardian, 19 Feb 2008). Has the VCEG considered the idea of Sussex joining with other leading universities to publicly oppose this policy on the part of the Research Councils, rather than simply adapting to it?

(For information, the Research Councils' strategic priorities are available at:

AHRC: <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/images/deliveryplan2007.pdf>

ESRC: [http://www.esrc.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/Images/ESRC\\_Delivery\\_Plan-2008-2011\\_tcm6-24959.pdf](http://www.esrc.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/Images/ESRC_Delivery_Plan-2008-2011_tcm6-24959.pdf)

BBSRC: [http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/publications/policy/bbsrc\\_delivery\\_plan.html](http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/publications/policy/bbsrc_delivery_plan.html)

EPSRC: <http://www.epsrc.ac.uk/CMSWeb/Downloads/Publications/Corporate/DeliveryPlanNov2007.pdf>

STFC: [http://www.scitech.ac.uk/resources/pdf/delplan\\_07.pdf](http://www.scitech.ac.uk/resources/pdf/delplan_07.pdf)

NERC: <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/about/perform/documents/deliveryplan200712.pdf>)

12. Several proposals for research themes originating from faculty have been circulated at School or University level in the form of 2-3 page documents. Why have arrangements not been made for faculty to see all such documents?
13. What steps does the VCEG plan to take to prevent the 'badging' of the University with a set of research themes from alienating faculty who do not feel that their research relates to this branding? What guarantees can the VCEG give that such faculty will not be disadvantaged in terms of support for their research relative to other faculty?
14. Does the VCEG plan to make future faculty appointments so as to boost expertise in the chosen research themes? If so, what role will the Departments involved have in the appointment process?

#### **D. Performance management**

15. The draft White Paper, appendix 5, sets Key Performance Indicators for all members of faculty. For example, by 2015 each member of staff in the sciences is supposed to bring in on average £100,000 a year in research grants, and each member of faculty in the University as a whole to have on average 2.0 PGR students. Is the intention to convert these average KPIs into individualised performance targets for each member of staff to attain by 2015?
16. If such individualised performance targets are planned, by what mechanisms does the VCEG intend to ensure that members of staff achieve them? What sanctions will be applied to those who do not? What steps will be taken to ensure that such making the achievement of them a necessary condition of satisfactory performance does not create 'unintended, adverse behaviours' in the form of a generalised loss of collegiality?

#### **E. Restructuring proposal**

17. As the title 'From Function to Structure' of the paper of 6th February indicates, the restructuring proposal has been presented as a means of enabling the University to achieve the aims of the

Strategic Plan being developed in the Green and White Papers. Why then has the proposal been announced before these Papers have been agreed?

18. How exactly is the proposed restructuring supposed to enable the University to reverse its relative decline in teaching and research performance?
19. S/216/7, 'From Function to Organisational Structure – An Update on Progress', rightly says that 'if a proposal to restructure academic units is taken forward, a detailed risk analysis will be required'. However what preliminary risk analysis was undertaken before announcing the proposal? In particular, the major restructuring that created the present Schools in 2003 showed that such a restructuring destroys loyalties to existing units which can take years to replace; that it destroys the institutional memory of how things are done which again can take up to two years to recover; that it inevitably alienates staff; and that in consequence of all the above it has deleterious effects on the student experience. How closely did VCEG examine this experience before announcing a proposal for another major restructuring?
20. Before announcing this proposal did the VCEG look at the failed attempt to aggregate IR and Politics at Sussex into a single Department? Has it looked at the consequences of the amalgamation of Departments in other universities? For example, Birmingham undertook a similar restructuring to proposed one in 1988. It has restructured again several times since. In its latest restructuring 17 budget-holding departments have been merged into 5 budget-holding 'colleges' with a new layer of management inserted in between the VC and departmental heads, taking them full circle. Has the VCEG considered the possibility that the proposed restructuring will only throw up a new set of problems, leading to a further costly restructuring in 3 or 4 years time as has been the case at other institutions?
21. How carefully did the VCEG consider the possibility of making the existing structures work better before announcing a proposal to replace them?
22. S/216/7 states that Heads of new Schools will normally have a term of about 5 years and earlier documents said that they would have an expected career progression to roles as Deans and PVCs. Given the anticipated burdens of this role, does this mean that those who become Heads of School would effectively be ending their careers as researchers?
23. For aggregated Schools, would the constituent Departments continue to have their own remunerated Head of Department? If they would not, not, then how is this consistent with the idea that the restructuring would increase Departmental autonomy? If they would, then given that of the 29 Departments on campus only 3 or 4 have the 30 members of faculty needed to become non-aggregated Schools and that for all the rest proposal would introduce four levels of organisation (VCEG, Faculties, new Schools, Departments) instead of the present three, how would this be consistent with the VC's ambition to 'flatten' the structure of the University?
24. It is claimed in the paper of 6th February that the restructuring proposal is an academic-led initiative responding to demands from Heads of Departments for greater Departmental autonomy. Were the Heads of Departments who made such demands consulted about the restructuring proposal before it was announced? What proportion of them agreed that the proposal answered to their demands?

## **F. Conclusion**

25. A great deal of concern has been expressed about the erosion of the democratic controls which staff and students presently have over the direction of the development of the University, particularly through Senate. What guarantees can the VCEG give that it will maintain these controls in future?
26. In 2003 the Brighton-based firm 'Circus' was commissioned by Council to write a report called *Proposed Vision for Sussex*. This argued that the route to a successful Sussex was by standing out from other universities, which 'increasingly compete to offer the same courses and are judged by the same standards'. Sussex could stand out 'by championing creative vitality and freedom of academic exploration' and by 'rejecting the transmission model of learning in favour of active intellectual and social engagement'. This would genuinely build on Sussex's identity and strengths. Why did the VCEG choose not to adopt such an approach to the future of the University in drafting the Green and White Papers?

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