

UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

The following notes present a summary of the key themes and issues emerging from the Joint Council and Strategy Committee Awayday held on 22 November 2004 to inform and support the annual review of the University Strategic Plan.

The meeting began with presentations on the following issues:

The Sustainability of Higher Education -

delivered by Professor Whitby and Professor Jones and informed by the OECD Report on Financial Management and Governance of Higher Education Institutions, the Higher Education Partnerships for Sustainability Report and a summary of both papers prepared by Professor Jones and Professor Whitby.

The key points highlighted in the presentations were:

- What does the University need to do to sustain its position?
- Is it realistic to aim for excellence in everything which we do?
- Are our research and teaching activities sustainable?
- Do we have a clear view of our strategic position?
- Are we planning for and investing in key areas of strength?
- How secure are our main sources of income?
- Is our income base appropriate for our strategy and sustainable operation?
- Are we exploiting opportunities for collaboration?

The University's Financial Position -

delivered by the Vice-Chancellor and the Director of Finance.

The presentation highlighted the following current major University developments and investment areas:

- HR Strategy
- Library
- Academic Staff
- Capital Expenditure
- Energy Efficiency

Strategic Objectives and Targeted Investment –

delivered by the Vice-Chancellor and informed by the University's Corporate Planning and Mission Statements, the University Corporate Plan to 2007 and a brief paper on key developments in the Higher Education sector.

The key points and questions raised in the presentation related to how the University should invest its resources in the future, for example in sustaining current functions, creating a surplus, investing in the RAE or investing in other areas. The optimum ratio of departmental reserve funds, as distinct from University reserves, was also raised.

Following the presentations the meeting broke into three discussion groups which focussed on issues relating to Sustainability and Targeted Investment. The points highlighted under each heading below represent the key points arising in discussion in groups and reported back to all those present at the final plenary session.

(a) Sustainability

Issues relating to HR and staff development in its widest sense are not given the priority necessary, in the context of sustainability, compared to estates and capital issues. Investment in talented staff in all areas is necessary, 'recruitment and retention' if the success of the University is to be maintained.

In order to sustain our level of performance in terms of research quality we need to generate a higher volume of research activity across all academic areas. In order to do this we need to create an environment for people which creates time for ideas to evolve, encourages champions for change and provides a degree of autonomy and freedom to develop and implement new ideas.

Sustainability of 'excellence' will be supported by improvements to our management and organisational arrangements. Our academic structures continue to be too departmentally focussed and we need to find new and better ways of developing new ideas speedily which cross departmental boundaries to better respond to external demands.

The University needs a mix of strategies to achieve success and sustainability, product champions and team builders.

(b) Targeted Investment

Has the University become too successful and consequently somewhat complacent?

How do we continue to encourage and nurture innovation?

We need to set bold and ambitious goals for our future development.

Focussing investment almost exclusively on the RAE 2008 is a poor strategy which will serve to jeopardise the University's long term future as a research led institution since it focuses on too narrow an area of activities and concerns. Notwithstanding this we must ensure that our RAE position is improved, or at the very least maintained and we must seek to identify the 'stars' of the future while ensuring that we do not lose the existing and emerging stars that we already have.

How do we generate adequate surpluses to ensure continued and sustainable investment in key areas. There may be some opportunities for efficiency gains but these are limited. We need to examine carefully our financial strategy and

whether we need to plan for surpluses as well as incorporating significant safety factors. We also need to examine, generate and exploit opportunities for entering into productive partnerships with the commercial sector and to reinvigorate the relationship between commercial and academic interests and priorities.

Should we target our investment towards existing strengths and if so what should we do about our less successful activities. We may need to invest to 'save'.

Targeted investment in the future must support the development of :

- Research
- Infrastructure
- Innovation and Entrepreneurship
- Collaboration
- Life Long Learning

We need to create a new University group, or forum, which will help to identify and support new investment ideas and targets and which, collectively, has the ability to envision what a successful 'Warwick' might look like in 20 or 30 years to come.