

Universitas 21 Heads of Administration Meeting: 23 and 24 April 2009

Representatives from 10 member institutions, comprising 22 individuals, attended the fifth meeting of Heads of Administration, held at Fudan University, Shanghai, on 23 and 24 April of this year. A very welcome additional participant was the U21 Secretary General, Jane Usherwood.

There were lively exchanges of experience and views, initiated by presentations from senior staff of Fudan and by participants, on a range of topics including:

- Planning in Times of Uncertainty;
- Sustainability in our Universities (with particular reference to student support);
- Staffing Issues;
- Developments and Trends in Institutional Governance; and
- Increasing the Efficiency of Support Services.

We also discussed U21's Operational Plan and the contribution which Heads of Administration might make to its success, and extensive informal discussion of a wide range of other topics of mutual interest.

There was a useful exchange of information on current and proposed organisational structures in the Universities represented at the meeting, with particular regard to the location of administrative and other support services. This raised the question of whether the nomenclature for our group – Heads of Administration – remained the most appropriate. We took the view that future meetings should be described in such a way as to encourage participation from those member institutions where there is not an identifiable senior officer who can be regarded as 'head of administration', and from a wider range of senior providers of professional support services. This would imply a beneficial widening of participation in the group's work. Indeed this was well illustrated by the fact that at this meeting we had encouraged attendance by up to three people from each member of U21, and this broadening of participation was very valuable to our discussions.

Participants were most grateful to our hosts in Fudan for their organisation of the meeting and their warm hospitality.

In addition to the discussion of specific topics, amongst the more general points to emerge from the meeting were:

- A continued wish to facilitate and develop opportunities for administrative staff exchanges and visits between U21 institutions, so as to broaden experience and share good practice;
- A willingness of participants to contribute to cyclical reviews of administrative services at other member institutions;
- A renewed willingness to pursue opportunities for benchmarking and exchange of comparative data, initially on a small, but international, scale and with a view to expanding participation subsequently;
- A continued willingness on the part of the group to advise and support Presidents in connection with specific U21 matters if so requested, but without in any way cutting across the role of the U21 Managers;
- The willingness of participants to act as an informal network for the electronic exchange of advice and good practice, especially in response to specific queries from members;
- The significance of the role of 'Heads of Administration' in embedding U21 activities in their institutions, and facilitating participation in such activities;

- The importance of those Heads of Administration who are not U21 Managers being kept well informed about U21 and its activities.

Colleagues agreed that there was considerable value in meeting every 18 - 24 months, but that this should be in the context of continued electronic interaction and pursuit of the matters set out above. One member of the group acts as 'virtual' chair (on a rotating basis), and the present chair, having overseen two meetings, has sought volunteers to take over this role.

Melvyn Cornish (Chair)
University Secretary
The University of Edinburgh

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