

Presentation to the Council of the University of Ghana of the Report of the Visitation Panel



Presentation to the Council of the University of Ghana of the Report of the Visitation Panel

Sir John Daniel, 20 December 2007

Transcript

Honourable Minister, Chairman of Council, Vice-Chancellor, Members of Council, Distinguished Guests.

It is a pleasure to be in Ghana once again and to present you with a brief summary of the Report of the Visitation Panel which I have had the honour to chair.

This Visitation Panel, which the Vice-Chancellor set up on behalf of Council almost a year ago, was a remarkable group of Ghanaian and international specialists whose collective expertise ranged over all aspects of higher education. Let me begin by naming them for you.

Membership of the Panel

I have had the honour to chair the Panel. The Commonwealth of Learning, of which I am president, has donated my time for this task and supported the Panel's work in other ways.

I was tremendously fortunate to have as my Vice-Chair your former Vice-Chancellor, Professor Akilagpa Sawyerr, who is the Secretary-General of the Association of African Universities.

The other members, in alphabetical order are:

Prof. Marian Ewurama **Addy**, Retired Professor of Biochemistry from this University.

Prof. Emmanuel **Akyeampong**, an alumnus of the University and now Professor of History and of African and African American Studies at Harvard University in the USA.

Mr Ato Pobee **Ampiah**, Managing Director of Crystal Auto Ltd., Ghana.

Emeritus Professor E.Q. **Archampong**, former Dean of Medicine at this University.

Professor Uday B. **Desai**, Professor of Electrical Engineering at the Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay.

Professor A.O. **Falase**, former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

Professor Marlene **Hamilton**, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, University of the West Indies.

Professor Bernard **King**, CBE, Principal and Vice-Chancellor, University of Abertay Dundee, Scotland.

Mr. Robert Ahomka **Lindsay**, CEO, Ghana Investment Promotion Centre.

Emeritus Professor Daryl **Lund**, University of Wisconsin, USA.

Professor Joseph **Nellis**, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Cranfield University, UK

Professor Michael **Shattock**, Visiting Professor at the University of London, UK.

Ms. Stamenka **Uvalić-Trumbić**, Chief of the Section for Reform, Innovation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education at UNESCO. Her time was donated by UNESCO, which also carried out some research for the Panel which enriched our report and, finally, Emerita Professor Kathleen **Wicker**, of Scripps College, USA.

It was a privilege for me to chair such a distinguished and diverse group of people. I would also like to acknowledge the tremendous support that we received from the first-rate Secretariat set up by the University and from a team of senior professors who facilitated our work.

Terms of Reference and Schedule of Work

The Terms of Reference which the University established for the Panel's work focused on three areas: Academic Programmes; Infrastructure and Resources, and the University's Administrative and Governance arrangements.

To carry out the work the Panel made two week-long visits to Accra, one in April and the second in August. These visits enabled us to meet the various constituencies of the University, which was invaluable. At our suggestion the University also commissioned an investigation into the Financial Administrative System, which took place in September.

We then wrote the Report by collaborating online in October and November using a very useful project management software called 'Basecamp'. Our terms of reference called for the Report to be submitted by the end of 2007 and I am pleased to say that copies arrived at the University on 6 December. I shall formally present a copy to the Chairman of Council in few minutes and copies will then be available for Council. I understand that you will all receive the Executive Summary of the Report, which will also be available to the Academic Board when I make a presentation to its members this afternoon.

May I also thank the University for putting the excellent facilities of the Centre for African Wetlands at our disposal during our visits? This was a most congenial working environment.

The Report

We have produced a substantial Report, which with its annexes runs to some 127 pages. Time only allows me to present highlights of it this morning and I shall focus on matters of particular interest to Council.

I shall not present Chapter 1, which gives background on the University of Ghana, except to draw your attention to this picture of the Great Hall and this quotation from a current professor who was a student here in the 1970s. My point in showing these is to emphasise great aspirations that accompanied the creation of this University and the great memories that its early students took away from their time at Legon.

We were asked to form a Visitation Panel because Council perceived that the University was slipping in its fulfilment of those national aspirations and in its service to students. I want to say at the outset that all members of our Visitation Panel believe that the University can recover its pre-eminent role in the intellectual life of Ghana. Our efforts were directed to helping the University to achieve that.

It is in the nature of reports like ours to focus on areas of difficulty and give less space to positive findings. Let me stress that the strong commitment that the Panel brought to its work reflected our conviction that the University of Ghana can become a leader in higher education globally. Across the campus we found widespread allegiance to the academic ideal that knowledge is important, which is the best foundation for a successful future.

Chapter Two places the University of Ghana in its African and National Contexts and I shall not dwell on this either. The issues it addresses are issues for the Government as well as the University.

Instead I shall move straight to Chapter Three, which is the meat of our report. It is in three sections, each devoted to one of the themes in our terms of reference. First, we look at the University as a Corporate Body and issues of Governance, Management and Administration.

Second, we examine the University as an Academic Institution. This is the core of the University's work but I shall touch on it only briefly this morning and report at greater length to the Academic Board this afternoon.

Finally we reviewed various issues of Infrastructure and Resources and I touch briefly on some of those.

Governance, Management and Administration

So, I return to the section on Governance, Management and Administration and begin with the crucial issue of the Composition of Council.

Our main chapter is entitled 'Analysis, Conclusions and Recommendations'. As that implies we have tried to analyse the situations we found, draw our conclusions, and then articulate those in the form of recommendations. We have tried to make those recommendations as clear and precise as possible. We have also, in the text of the Report, given examples of practice in other countries where we thought it relevant.

In the slides that follow I have taken short verbatim quotes from our Report under the headings of analysis, conclusions and recommendations. I am doing it this way because I want to be completely faithful to Panel's Report.

Composition and Role of Council

Our first finding was the composition and role of the Council is seriously out of line with practice in other countries that you might use as comparators, such as South Africa, the UK, Australia and New Zealand.

The Panel concluded that *current good practice calls for a governing body of between 15 to 30 members, with a lay (external) majority of about two-thirds to one third, with a significant proportion of the lay majority brought on to the governing body through a nominations committee process to ensure that there is expertise in areas such as finance, property management, legal matters, and human resource management.*

Set against such practice and against the emerging consensus about governance around the world,, the Council of the University of Ghana is unusual in three ways. First, at 15 members, it is smaller than the governing bodies of many universities of similar size, where a figure of around 25 might be more usual. Second, the Council membership is mostly nominated by external bodies or drawn from internal constituencies. Third, and most unusually, a majority of the membership is from these internal constituencies.

Two of our key recommendations are therefore that:

The membership of the Council should be expanded to over 20 members and its composition should be substantially changed to enable it to play an effective role as the governing body of the University.

And that

The Council should have committees for:

Audit;

Finance and General Purposes;

Nominations;

Physical Development

This represents a different division of responsibilities between the Council and the Academic Board from what you have now but we believe change is essential. This is not just theory. I shall come later to the very serious problems that the University faces in its financial management.

The Panel believes that if, in recent years, the University of Ghana Council had had the role and composition that we recommend some of the problems that the University now faces, notably in its financial management, would have been avoided.

Academic Board

I come now to the Academic Board.

The legal membership of the Board includes all associate and full professors, all heads of 92 departments and institutes, one elected member from each department and other elected members. Membership varies around a figure of 200 as senior lecturers become associate professors and new departments are created. Attendance at meetings is around 100. The Panel considers that an Academic Board of this size is simply too large and unwieldy to operate efficiently.

We conclude that the whole structure is overlarge, inert and indecisive, over concerned with formalities, not much concerned with the tasks of managing the University through very difficult times, and not at all concerned with strategy and thinking about the future. Its highly representative nature also means that it is defensive in character, responsive to events, and not proactive. These judgements should not be interpreted as indicating opposition to academics playing a significant role in university governance, but to make that role effective the University needs to run itself in a business-like way.

We have a number of recommendations to make here. Two of the most important are:

The membership of the Academic Board should be reduced to between 35 and 40, its composition comprising the Vice-Chancellor, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor, the Provosts and deans and equal representation from faculty boards and schools on the basis of a balance in each representation between professors and non-professors.

We also recommend considerable change in the Academic Board Committees and that in particular:

The Academic Board Executive Committee should be revised to create a central Policy and Executive Committee for the University and should take over the functions of the Vice-Chancellor's Management Group... We recommend a composition for this.

Organisation, Management and Administration

I come now to the way that the University manages and administers the policies set by the Council and the Academic Board.

We found that the structures for managing the University, undermined by the managerial reforms introduced in 2003, have allowed the University, overwhelmed by student number expansion, to slide into a poor state of organisation and effectiveness.

We noted that in 2003 the then Vice-Chancellor introduced a new organisational structure...

Whatever the theoretical merits of this reorganisation it clearly has not worked. We conclude that the Vice-Chancellor needs what in some universities is called a Chief Operating Officer, a senior officer who integrates the management of the many services that are necessary to the running of the University...

This reorganisation is all the more necessary because there are serious operational problems in the management of the Finance Office and in the physical maintenance of the campus and its facilities.

The Panel recommends that the Council should give the Registrar the responsibilities of Chief Operating Officer with a mandate: (i) to integrate and professionalise the services necessary to the running of the University and make them work; (ii) to present a new administrative structure chart to Council and the Academic Board after consultation with the Vice-Chancellor and the (new) Policy and Executive Committee; (iii) to introduce modern human resources practices throughout the institution so that the operating units are empowered and supported in fulfilling their functions; and (iv) to implement an effective and transparent management information system.

Student Representation

The next issue we tackled was student representation. We found that *students are not well represented on the governance of the University particularly in areas where academic matters are discussed. They are not satisfied with the constitutional role of the Dean of Students and wish to represent themselves in discussions with the university authorities.*

On this issue UNESCO kindly conducted some research amongst the universities of Europe from which we observed:

The almost universal Western practice of student involvement in University governance structures because they are universities' key stakeholders. As payment of tuition fees becomes more and more universal this pressure for taking account of students' views will only increase.

The major strategic committees of the University should not be dealing with detail of student examination results and staff promotions - agenda items which are cited as a reason for excluding students from these bodies

So the Panel recommends:

That the University introduces student representation on the Council, the Academic Board, the Faculty Boards and committees of these bodies as appropriate.

Improving Student Life

Our final section on Governance, Management and Administration deals with Improving Student Life and here we found some very worrisome issues.

Residential Accommodation

First on the matter of Residential Accommodation *the Panel found that the living conditions in some of the halls were unacceptable and a health hazard. A major problem is 'perching', whereby students who do not officially have rooms in a hall find their way past security and fill rooms to double their capacity.*

The Panel considers that as soon as the new student accommodation that is being built starts to come on stream, the University should centralise the management of all residences. It is essential for the academic culture of the University and the health of the student body to put an end to 'perching'

So we recommend that *a new post of Director of Student Residences should be established, reporting to the Registrar, to take control of the management of the residences, including particularly their physical maintenance and upkeep...*

And, jumping ahead to the Infrastructure and Resources section of the Report that

The halls, particularly Commonwealth Hall, should be evacuated and rehabilitated before things degenerate further.

Thereafter, re-population of the halls should be done in a way that ensures there is no overcrowding and no 'perching.'

Dean of Students

The other issue we reviewed in relation to Improving Student Life is the role of the Dean of Students.

The Panel's analysis is that *the Dean of Students under the present remit is required to undertake responsibilities which involve inherent conflicts of interest: he is required to act in a disciplinary capacity, a welfare capacity and as an intermediary between the University and the Student Representative Council.*

We make recommendations about how to resolve these conflicts but in the interests of time I shall now move to the section of the Report on the University of Ghana as an Academic Institution - what the University is here for.

The Academic Core

We looked at a number of issues. I shall explore them further with the Academic Board this afternoon. I shall just highlight five and refer you to the Executive Summary for the longer list.

Enrolment Explosion

First, the main reason for the degradation of the University that led to the setting up of the Visitation Panel was and is an Enrolment Explosion.

The enrolment explosion is the cause of many of the University's problems. The Panel recommends reducing the intake of students; placing a limit on class size; balancing student numbers with physical infrastructure and faculty capacity; introducing stronger policy for gender parity; promoting distance learning to absorb continuing demand; and expanding Accra City Campus.

Curriculum

Second, the University is not renewing its curriculum adequately.

*We found that in some departments the **curriculum** had not been reviewed for many years. Recommendations include: departmental and curriculum reviews every five years; student evaluation of courses and instructors; new interdisciplinary courses; a course on Gender and Development for all students; and the internationalisation of student experience.*

Academic Organisation

Third, we found a widespread belief that the University could solve its problems by moving to a college structure. The Panel does not think this is a solution and *urges that any move to a collegiate structure be postponed at least until the other recommendations in the Report have been implemented. These include: delegating greater power to the faculties for appointments and promotions; reviewing the semester and course/credit system and its associated examinations; allowing the flexibility to hold examinations only at the end of year for courses that are not yet properly modularised; expanding intranet and internet facilities; encouraging the use of audio-visual technology in teaching; and improving lines of accountability.*

Graduate Study

Fourth, the Panel considers that the University should develop graduate study as a priority.

We recommend: an urgent review of graduate programmes by departments for relevance and breadth of courses; more use of visiting professors and professionals from outside the University; strategic fundraising from industry for research; rethinking the graduate school administration; and creating more synergy between Institutes and Centres and academic units.

Quality Assurance

Fifth, the Panel considers that attention to quality assurance needs beefing up considerably. We believe that one of the most useful things the Panel did was to initiate a process of departmental self-assessments after its April visit. Nearly 70 of the 82 departments responded: some responses were good, some were lamentable, but the University must build on what we started:

To mainstream elements of quality assurance the Panel recommends: strengthening the Academic Quality Assurance Unit, which should report to a new Academic Quality Curriculum, Quality and Staff Development Committee to be Chaired by a Pro-Vice Chancellor; departmental reviews every five years to be preceded by self-assessment exercises and quality audits; and annual exit surveys of the graduating class with periodic surveys of employers.

Infrastructure and Resources

Finally, I turn to our section on Infrastructure and Resources. You can see that we looked at 12 issues. Both in the interests of time, and because its seriousness far outweighs all the others, I shall focus only on the first, the Financial Administrative System. As I noted earlier, the University set up a special

Investigating Team into this at the Panel's suggestion. The Team's Report is reproduced in full in the Panel's Report and is an integral part of it.

We are sorry to find that the financial administrative system at the University of Ghana is in a very bad state, is not providing anything approaching the services needed by the University, and needs radical change.

The Team concluded that *the Finance Office needs new leadership as soon as possible. The current direction of the Office's work is wrong.*

But also that *the ITS financial software can be made to serve the University's needs, and probably serve them well, so should be retained.*

It urges that *Budgeting, reporting and accounting by the Finance Office has to be transformed by new practices, so that the University's financial position and prospects are understood at all levels of management.*

The Team's Report has a series of detailed recommendations about how to transform a bad situation. But there is some good news.

Most institutions with such weaknesses find they are in a financial hole; but the University of Ghana has significant unspent balances - which could be harnessed to the agenda for change.

Conclusion

Minister, Chairman, Vice-Chancellor, Ladies and Gentlemen: there is much more in the Panel's Report than I have been able to communicate today. However, we consider that the next step is for the Council to study the Report in detail and to make decisions on it.

Let me end where I began. The Visitation Panel has been proud to serve the University in preparing this Report because it believes that the University of Ghana can and must recover its greatness so as to serve as the intellectual powerhouse of the nation and a beacon for its young people.

The Panel has asked me to thank you for the privilege of serving you and to express the willingness of all its members to be helpful in the future should the need arise. Finally, Chairman, we express our warm thanks to you and to the Vice-Chancellor for your constant support and encouragement throughout the last nine months.

We wish every success to the University of Ghana.