

## **Universitas 21 Heads of Administration Meeting: 19 & 20 September 2006**

Representatives from 11 member institutions, comprising 14 individuals, attended the fourth gathering of Heads of Administration, held at the Universities of Glasgow and Edinburgh on 19 and 20 September of this year. A very welcome participant was the U21 Secretary General, Jane Usherwood.

There were lively exchanges of experience and views, initiated by presentations from senior staff of Edinburgh and Glasgow and by participants, on a range of topics including: current issues in institutional governance; strategic planning and institutional performance monitoring; marketing in higher education; risk management; commercialisation of research/third stream funding; implementing shared services; and developing estates strategies. There was also discussion of the future role of U21 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.

Participants were thrilled to be shown some of the treasures in Edinburgh's Special Collections and to visit the Whistler exhibition and the Charles Rennie Mackintosh House at Glasgow's Hunterian Gallery.

Amongst the points to emerge from the group's discussions were:

- A 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 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 possibility that professional marketing staff at member institutions might work with the U21 Secretariat on marketing the network;
- 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 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. There was thought to be merit in one member of the group acting as 'virtual' chair (on a rotating basis). Melvyn Cornish from the University of Edinburgh has agreed to perform this role for an initial period.