

SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE INVESTMENT REVIEW COMMITTEE

Confirmed minutes of a meeting held on 28 November 2013

Present: Mr Younger (in the chair), Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research, ASUC), Ms Mair, Mr Mason,¹ Ms Tennant,² Mr Tomlinson (OUSU), Professor Vogenauer.

In attendance: Mrs Hudspith (Secretary).

Apologies: None

Ref. FIN/114/SRI

The Chair welcomed Professor Vogenauer to his first meeting.

1. **Conflict of interest** (SRIRC(13)09)

The Committee **received and noted** information about the University's Conflict of Interest Policy and the management of conflicts of interest in relation to committee business.

It was noted that socially responsible investment was an area in which many people might have a conflict of interest.

Members were asked to declare any interest that could give rise to conflict in relation to any item on the agenda.

The Chair and two members disclosed connections with relevance to item 4 on the agenda, under which the Committee would consider a resolution of OUSU Council concerning fossil fuel companies. The Committee did not consider that any of the connections disclosed represented a conflict of interest.

2. **Minutes of the meeting held on 2 July 2013** (SRIRC(13)10)

The minutes were **approved**.

3. **Matters arising**

(a) *Minute 3(a): Review of the SRI Policy and related remits* (SRIRC(13)11)

The Committee **noted** the progress through GPC of the proposed revisions to the SRI Policy and the regulations governing the Committee and that Council would consider the proposals on 2 December 2013. [**Post-meeting note:** Council approved the policy and agreed to make changes in regulations as proposed. The amended regulations came into effect on 20 December 2013.]

The Committee recalled that the launch of its new website had been put on hold pending approval of the new policy and revised regulations. One area of content was still under development: the FAQs. A draft set of FAQs was circulated and members invited to review and submit comments to the Secretary by 12 December 2013.

(b) *Minute 4: Annual report* (SRIRC(13)12)

The Committee **received** a draft annual report to GPC, which was tabled. In a brief discussion, the Committee asked that an executive summary be incorporated into the report. Member were invited to submit any further suggestions to the Secretary by 4 December 2013.

¹ Mr Mason joined the meeting by telephone.

² Present for item 4 only

4. **Representation concerning the University's Policy on Socially Responsible Investment (SRIRC(13)13)**

The Committee **received** a representation concerning the University's Policy on Socially Responsible Investment, in the form of a resolution of the Council of OUSU. The resolution was part of a motion passed by OUSU Council, without dissent, in June 2013. The Committee also received a supplementary paper developed by the Environment and Ethics Campaign.

It was noted that only part 1 of the resolution sought action by the University:

“OUSU Council therefore resolves to make known to the University its support for greater transparency with respect to financial transactions involving organisations in the fossil fuel industry, and for the University to cooperate with divulging, on request, information relative to previous transactions”.

It was noted that the supplementary paper went one step further, in requesting divestment from fossil fuel companies. However, as OUSU Council had not resolved to seek divestment this was not a matter for current consideration. It was noted to be likely that OUSU Council would be asked to make such a resolution in due course.

In its initial discussion, the Committee observed:

- that there was no standard definition of 'fossil fuel industry' – this could be taken to refer to companies which extract fossil fuels, companies which use fossil fuels to generate energy and/or companies which use fossil fuels to generate other products (e.g. petroleum-based plastics). In the first instance, therefore, the Committee **agreed** to request clarification as to what OUSU meant by 'fossil fuel industry';
- that the resolution referred to 'financial transactions'. However, its remit was confined to investments. Any decision related to other types of transaction (such as research funding or donations) would be a matter for other bodies; however,
- a decision in one area might have implications another. For instance, a decision to divest could affect relationships with research funders or potential donors.

In light of this last point, the Committee considered that, to proceed further, once OUSU had confirmed its definition of 'fossil fuel industry' there would be a need to understand the University's overall position in relation to that industry. Specifically, the Committee would seek to gather information about:

- relevant research activity within the University;
- policy on the receipt of donations and any significant donors with connections to the industry;
- policy on the receipt of research funding and any significant funders with connections to the industry.

One possible response to the current resolution might be to recommend the issuing of a University position statement on the fossil fuel drawing together the information gathered. Noting that this information concerned matters that were outside its remit, the Committee **agreed** to draw this matter to the attention of GPC at the earliest opportunity.

It might also be useful to understand the position of other HEIs on fossil fuels, the position of organisations outside the HE sector, and the extent to which companies within the fossil fuel industry (however defined) were themselves investing in the development of alternative energy sources. Members of the committee agreed to share information they might have on this.

With regard to the process for making a recommendation in response to the representation, it was noted that the Committee reported directly to Council on such matters. It was envisaged that the Committee would engage with the Investment Committee (IC) to inform its decision, but noted that the Committee was under no obligation to reach an agreed joint position with the IC. In addition, Council might, itself, consult the IC to inform its decision.

5. **Membership** (SRIRC(13)14)

The Committee **noted** its current membership and the actions in hand to deal with vacancies.

6. **Requests for information relevant to the remit of the SRIRC** (SRIRC(13)15)

The Committee **received** a report on requests for information relevant to the remit of the SRIRC, including those made formally under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act.

Three requests had been received since the Committee's last meeting. The paper set out the requests made, but not the responses given. The Committee asked that the responses be provided and that consideration be given to whether and how responses might be published on its website. The Secretary would consult the University's Freedom of Information Office and bring proposals back to the Committee's next meeting.

7. **People and Planet Green League** (SRIRC(13)16)

The Committee **received** a brief paper on the assessment of the University's performance on ethical investment made as part of the People and Planet Green League in 2012 and 2013. The Committee noted that the University had scored two points out of a possible three in each year and discussed, briefly, the criteria adopted by the Green League in relation to ethical investment.

8. **Any other business**

There was no other business

9. **Dates of forthcoming meetings**

Thursday 6 March 2014

Thursday 12 June 2014

Thursday 27 November 2014

All meetings would commence at 9.00 a.m. in Meeting Room 1/2 of the University Offices, Wellington Square, and last up to 90 minutes.

The date of the July 2014 meeting (incorporating the OUEM presentation) would be fixed by correspondence during Hilary Term.

The Chair has authority to cancel a meeting for lack of business.

ERH

18 February 2014