Alasdair Smith is new VC

The Council has appointed Professor Alasdair Smith as the University’s new Vice-Chancellor. The appointment, on the nomination of the Search Committee set up last Autumn, was made at a special meeting held on Friday (24 July) and was recommended to the Council by a special Senate meeting held earlier in the day.

Professor Smith, who has been Acting Vice-Chancellor since Professor Gordon Conway left the University at the end of March to become President of the Rockefeller Foundation in New York, formally took up his appointment as the University’s sixth Vice-Chancellor on Saturday 25 July. He has been appointed for an initial period of five years, subject to renewal for a further period or periods at the discretion of the Council.

The choice of Alasdair Smith follows an international search by the Committee, working with recruitment specialists Korn/Ferry. Advertisements in UK and international papers together with nominations and an extensive search process conducted by Korn/Ferry and by members of the Committee resulted in well over one hundred names being considered. These were whittled down to a long list of approximately eleven who met members of the Committee informally and finally to a formal interview short list of four candidates.

Alasdair Smith, 49, has been Professor of Economics at Sussex since 1981, coming from a post at the London School of Economics. He is a well known international economist whose research has focused on the effects of international trade on national welfare and on the distribution of income. His work with Tony Venables (now at the LSE) on estimating the effects of the single European market provided the framework for subsequent studies by the European Commission and others. More recently he has conducted research on the economic effects of enlarging the EU to include eastern European countries.

Since coming to Sussex he has been Economics Graduate Chair (1982-84 and 1986-88), Economics Subject Chair (1989-90), Dean of the School of European Studies (1991-94) and, from August 1997, Senior Pro-Vice-Chancellor.

Professor Smith was born on the Isle of Lewis in Scotland. He was educated at the University of Glasgow, the London School of Economics and Oxford University. He is married to Sherry Ferdman, who is a tutor in social studies in the Centre for Continuing Education. Their two daughters are students: the elder has just finished her first year in the history department at University College, London, and the younger is about to start her A levels at Brighton, Hove and Sussex Sixth Form College.

The new Vice-Chancellor is optimistic about the future of Sussex: "Although we are not a large university, we have research strength across a broad range of disciplines, from the humanities to atomic physics. Traditional public funding for universities is not going to expand at the rate we need, so we have to find new sources of research funding. We'll be helped by the fact that Sussex is particularly strong in the sciences of the 21st century – biological and computing sciences. We also have a very strong record of policy studies in the social sciences: in development studies, science policy and European studies.”