

BOARD OF GOVERNORSMinutes of the meeting held on 29 September 2014

Present

Bernard Laverty	Independent member	Chair of the Board
Lesley Munro		Clerk to the Board
Martin Ainscough	Independent member	
Richard Benjamin	Independent member	
John Cater	Vice-Chancellor	Ex-officio
Clive Edwards	Independent member	
Lisa Greenhalgh	Independent member	Chair: Audit Committee
Stephen Hesford	Independent member	
David Owen	Independent member	Deputy Chair & Chair of Resources Committee
Simon Pope	Independent member	
Connor Richmond	Student member	Elected
Kayley Wilson	Student member	SU President

In attendance

Lynda Brady	PVC & University Secretary
Steve Igoe	Deputy Vice-Chancellor
Paul Malone	Students' Union General Manager

Apologies

Mark Allanson	PVC (External Relations)	
Rob Green	Independent member	
Bill Johnson	Support staff member	Elected
John Maxwell	Independent member	
Lynnette Turner	Academic staff member	Elected
Denise Walker	Independent member	

BG.14.001 Presentation: Admissions Systems

(Document BG/001/14 circulated at the meeting)

The Head of Admissions detailed the functions and scope of the Service which is responsible for the administration of the Fastrack programme and Initial Teacher Training (ITT) skills test support sessions as well as undergraduate and postgraduate admissions. She highlighted the volume of applications received (in excess of 28,000) and the challenges for the service in processing these and establishing the University's computerised student record in line with the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) requirements. The Service works with a variety of national application clearing systems which are mostly operated through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) and a brief summary of the application cycle was outlined.

In discussion, the following points were noted:

- The University did not make unconditional offers to students awaiting examination results but did operate compensation for borderline cases and students with special circumstances at Confirmation;
- Clearing represented a particular stage of the application process for students without a place following publication of exam results. Largely reliant on telephone communication, it was an important aspect of the recruitment process which required careful management to ensure students were supported to make good choices at this late stage;
- Entry qualification levels continued to improve and the University had taken a conscious decision to maintain the quality of the intake during Clearing in recent years. This had a positive impact both on retention and degree results;
- Management information on the number of offers made and accepted was produced weekly through the main cycle and daily during Clearing so that the University could manage the number of places available accurately;
- There was some evidence to suggest that the number of students who did not arrive to enrol was linked to the lack of on-site residential accommodation, supporting the Board's decision to invest in increasing provision;

- The Admissions Office worked closely with the Student Recruitment Service to enable good communication and relationship building throughout the applicant journey. An on-line mentoring scheme for applicants operated as part of this;
- Whilst some Universities paid little regard to applicant personal statements, these were an important part of the decision-making process at Edge Hill providing a contextual element which allowed for more tailored offers to be made.

Members thanked the Head of Admissions for an interesting and informative presentation.

BG.14.002 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest specific to the meeting.

BG.14.003 Chair's Announcements

There were no announcements.

BG.14.004 Chair's Action

There was no Chair's Action to report.

BG.14.005 Minutes of the previous meeting

Received: Document BG/002/14

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 July 2014 were agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

BG.14.006 Action Log

Received: Document BG/003/14

Members received the Action Log noting that, following further consideration it had been agreed the Board should not to enter into any correspondence with OfSTED concerning the recent ITT inspection. In relation to link governor roles, it was noted that Rob Green had confirmed his continuing interest in Academic Planning Committee whilst Richard Benjamin was considering a link with Learning and Teaching Committee.

BG.14.007 Matters arising not included elsewhere on the agenda

There were no matters arising.

SECTION A ITEMS

BG.14.008 Confirmation of Standing Orders

Received: Document BG/004/14

Members **agreed** to adopt the Standing Orders as presented noting a minor change to clause 9 to reflect changes in the Executive structure.

Action: Clerk

BG.14.009 Board Self-Evaluation

Received: Document BG/005/14

Members considered the documentation presented by the Clerk which summarised attendance and membership aspects, the business conducted over the year and the schedule of business for the coming year. **It was agreed** that performance had been satisfactory and that no changes to the Terms of Reference were required.

BG.14.010 Use of the University Seal

Received: Document BG/006/14

It was noted that there had been no use of the University Seal during 2013/14.

BG.14.011 Minutes of Committees

*.01 **Audit Committee** (15 September 2014)*

Received: Document BG/0007/14

The Chair of Audit introduced the minutes highlighting the positive report in relation to the HEFCE Assurance Review, improvements in the Highly Trusted Status (HTS) Compliance Review and the substantial assurance provided by two internal audit reports which

covered compliance with the UUK Accommodation Code and Data Assurance in relation to Key Information Sets (KIS). She also drew attention to the discussion on the new HEFCE Memorandum of Assurance and Accountability which was itemised later on the Board agenda.

The Audit Committee minutes were received.

BG.14.012 Provisional Financial Outturn 31 July 2013

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor reported that the 2013/14 accounts had been closed down at the end of the previous week and he thanked staff in Finance for their efforts in achieving early completion. Final figures gave a surplus of £17.5 million with income at £115.4 million and expenditure at £97.9 million. Having regard to the impact of inflation, investment commitments, changes to the capitalisation policy and the five-year revaluation of the estate, this represented an excellent performance.

It was noted that the end of year audit had been completed with no issues raised.

In response to a member's question, it was reported that work on the Sports Development would progress subject to receipt of anticipated income from the Student Loans Company.

Members welcomed the verbal report on the 2013/14 financial outturn.

BG.14.013 The University's Collaborative Provision

Received: Document BG/008/14

The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) introduced the paper which was provided for information and reassurance in relation to the University's collaborative academic partnerships. It was noted that whilst access to directly funded student numbers had led to a decrease in activity with the Further Education sector, new partnerships were being established with specialist and niche providers reflecting the University's strategic development in areas such as healthcare.

In response to a member's question, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor confirmed that all partnerships were subject to a robust due diligence assessment which took account of financial integrity and also ensured the protection of students through the development of a planned exit

strategy. Legal advice on agreements was available in-house with specialist external advice accessed where appropriate.

The report on the University's Collaborative Provision was received.

BG.14.014 Capital Projects Update

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor reported that whilst the new residential development was fully operational with students in occupancy, completion had taken longer than expected and this would be subject to review. Work on the Sports Development was being completed in stages and would continue as finance became available.

In discussion, it was agreed that further residential development would be beneficial to the recruitment effort although it was noted that there were challenges in identifying an appropriate location with a number of options being considered.

Members received the verbal update on Capital Projects.

BG.14.015 WLBC/EHU Forum (18 July 2014)

Received: Document BG/009/14

The Chair reported that the main topic of discussion had been concerns around the arrangements for Fresher's Week and it was therefore particularly pleasing to note that this had been exceptionally well managed this year. Whilst noting that relationships between the University, the Students' Union and WLBC officers were generally good, the importance of maintaining positive public relations with the local community remained a priority.

It was reported that the Director of Facilities Management and the Director of Student Services were arranging to visit Loughborough and Warwick Universities in order to benchmark practice.

Members received the report on the WLBC/EHU Forum.

BG.14.016 Annual Report from Academic Board

Received: Document BG/010/14

The report from Academic Board outlining activity over the year was received.

BG.14.017 HEFCE Memorandum of Assurance and Accountability

Received: Document BG/011/14

The Clerk outlined the major changes in the new HEFCE Memorandum which became operational in August 2014. In particular, the new document reflected HEFCE's wider role as regulator for the sector and its responsibilities for the protection of the collective student interest as well as safeguarding public funds.

The most significant changes for Governing Bodies were the inclusion of the requirement to assure the quality of data submitted to the Student Loans Company and the move to a single threshold for the requirement to obtain HEFCE consent for borrowing. This would now be based on a multiple (currently set at 5) of the average of the Earnings before Interest, Tax Depreciation and Amortisation (EBITDA) surplus and provided considerable additional freedom to institutions.

Other changes included the continued development of an annual sustainability statement, the requirement to subscribe to the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) in order to provide financial sustainability during its transition to lower grant funding and changes to the trigger for exchequer interest repayments. The Audit Code of Practice had been streamlined and there was a significant reduction in the number of appendices.

Recognising the importance of the Memorandum to overall governance arrangements, members were encouraged to familiarise themselves with the new provisions.

The HEFCE Memorandum of Assurance and Accountability was received.

SECTION B ITEMS

BG.14.018 Vice-Chancellor's Report

Received: Document BG/012/14

The Vice-Chancellor introduced his report drawing attention to the following points:

- The nature of the student profile at the University had changed in recent years with a significant decrease in part-time student numbers, reflecting the withdrawal of central funding for professional development (PPD) programmes. In income terms, this had been mitigated in the short term by the introduction of the £9k tuition fee for full-time students and considerable improvements in retention rates;
- The longer term funding position presented a more complex and testing picture with a cap on fee levels, the withdrawal of government support for scholarships and hardship funding, the continued shift in funding for teacher training towards school-based provision, cuts in the unit price for training health professionals and uncertainty about government policy following the General Election in May 2015. It was noted that the widely publicised suggestion from the Labour Party shadow minister that fees should be reduced to £6k (with additional central funding for institutions) had been heavily challenged in terms of cost and was still under discussion;
- Maintaining market demand for the University's provision remained critical in ensuring long-term stability. Improvements in conversion rates had compensated for relatively flat application rates for 2014 entry and overall enrolments were in excess of budget estimates. Within this however there had been a shift in the mix of the new student cohort and whilst the significant increase in well qualified (ABB) students was to be generally welcomed, the University would fall short of meeting its Student Number Control (SNC) allocation (<ABB) which could have a negative impact if it was reintroduced in the future as seemed likely;
- In terms of reputation, results in the National Student Survey were strong and supported the University's commitment to the provision of an excellent student experience although this had to be maintained on an annual basis. The nomination for the Times Higher University of the Year (the fourth in seven years) underlined a growing national profile;
- Increasing Research and Knowledge Transfer capacity remained an important area of development which could substantially improve the University's standing in the sector. Whilst a measurable improvement was anticipated from the results of the 2013 Research Evaluation Framework (REF) submission, substantial gains would require continued long-term commitment.

In discussion, it was noted that:

- New portfolio development was underway which would help to broaden the recruitment base;
- Current spending on bursary and scholarship provision was high (around £4 million) but the impact on recruitment and retention was difficult to evaluate. In the light of further reductions in government support, the University would seek to maintain hardship and disability funding but would need to reassess other schemes with a view to achieving best value for money;
- Government should be encouraged to look at more innovative options in relation to student funding such as the concept of 'forgiveable' loans;
- The University was aware of the variety of scenarios which could pertain following the General Election and that it might be necessary to re-vision the size and shape of the organisation but it was not possible to undertake long-term strategic planning without more certainty. The strength of the University's financial position provided a buffer to allow time for more clarity to emerge.

Members congratulated the University on the Times Higher nomination and thanked the Vice-Chancellor for his clear articulation of the challenges ahead.

The Vice-Chancellor's report was received.

BG.14.019 National Student Survey results 2013

Received: Document BG/013/14

The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) introduced the report highlighting the increased response rate and improvement in the majority of scores. The significant increases in the scores for Personal Development and Organisation were particularly pleasing as was the improvement in the score for Students' Union. Whilst the overall satisfaction score had dropped by 0.01 from 4.25 to 4.24, the average across all questions (a more rounded measure) maintained our position as top in the North West. It was noted that Project Groups had been

established to investigate specific areas in order to better understand student responses and to analyse the information in more detail.

In response to a member's question concerning the lower score for Learning Resources, it was reported that this would be further analysed but the Service areas concerned were proactive in contacting specific student groups to address any issues identified.

Members received the 2013 National Student Survey report.

BG.14.020 First Destination Survey 2013

Received: Document BG/014/14

The Vice-Chancellor introduced the report which outlined the success of graduates in gaining employment or continuing with further study in the six months following graduation. Results showed an improvement from 93.4% to 93.5% overall (third in the North West) although there were still challenges for students from the Faculty of Arts and Sciences in obtaining graduate level jobs. It was noted that the Pro Vice-Chancellor (External Relations) would be focusing on this aspect, working with colleagues to increase work placement opportunities to enhance graduate CVs.

In response to a member's question, it was noted that international opportunities were limited but that this was an area the University was seeking to develop.

Members received the 2013 First Destination Survey report.

BG.14.021 Student Report

Received: Document BG/015/14

The President of the Students' Union introduced her report drawing attention to the new Strategic Plan which identified five themes for development over the next three years. The themes covered Employability, Enterprise and Entrepreneurialism; Representation, Democracy and Advice; Cultural and Social Opportunities; Customer Experience and External Partnerships.

In discussion, the General Manager of the Students' Union highlighted the importance (and success) of partnership working with the University.

Members congratulated the Students' Union on the success of Freshers' Week including the organisation of the Liverpool night out with over 2,000 students participating. It was noted that there would always be capacity issues for individual on-site events and it was important to offer choice to alleviate this. The President reported excellent sign-up to student societies.

The elected Student Governor reported that the Raising and Giving (RAG) society was continuing and would be supporting a range of local charities. He also outlined the role of VIBE Media in offering opportunities for students to enhance their employability skills and it was agreed the availability of facilities should be further discussed with the University Executive.

Action: University Executive

The Student report was received.

BG.14.022 Any other Business

There was no other business.

SECTION C ITEMS

BG.14.023 Academic Board Minutes (2 July 2014)

Received: Document BG/016/14

The Academic Board minutes were received.

BG.14.024 Date and time of next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for 1 December 2014.