

BOARD OF GOVERNORSMinutes of the meeting held on 14 May 2018

Present

Clive Edwards	Independent member	Chair of the Board
Lesley Munro		Clerk to the Board
Martin Ainscough	Independent member	
Paul Aplin	Academic staff member	Elected
Roy Bayfield	Support Staff member	Elected
John Cater	Vice-Chancellor	Ex-officio
Graeme Collinge	Independent member	Chair: Resources Committee
Christine Donnelly	Independent member	
Clive Elliott	Independent member	
Rob Green	Independent member	
Lisa Greenhalgh	Independent member	Deputy Chair & Chair: Audit
Tony Rankin	Independent member	
Louise Robinson	Independent member	
George Talbot	Academic staff member	Academic Board nominee
Ben Whittle	Student member	Students' Union President

In attendance

Mark Allanson	PVC (External Relations)
Lynda Brady	PVC (Student Experience) & University Secretary
Steve Igoe	Deputy Vice-Chancellor
Liam Owens	Director of Student Recruitment and Administration (for presentation on Student Recruitment)

Apologies

Julian Bucknall	Independent member
Mike Rush	Independent member

Observer

Luke Myer	Student Governor elect
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Absent

Thomas Dodd	Student member	Elected
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The Chair welcomed Luke Myer, student governor elect, as an observer to the meeting.

BG.17.092 Student Recruitment: Challenges and Opportunities

(Copies of presentation slides circulated after the meeting and included in the minute book)

The Director of Student Recruitment and Administration gave a detailed presentation on the current position with respect to student recruitment highlighting the following points:

- The policy context including the drive to increase competition and the relaxation of student number controls;
- The new regulatory framework and its emphasis on access to a high quality, value for money, academic experience leading to a graduate level job;
- Increasingly aggressive competitor behaviour in the face of a decreasing 18 year old demographic including incentives and a growth in unconditional offers;
- The loss of the mature student market following the increase in fee levels and the growth in competition for BTEC and Clearing applicants from Russell Group universities.

Acknowledging the impact of increased competition on application rates, the Director of Student Recruitment and Administration outlined the main features of the University's response plan which emphasised:

- Holding to quality in terms of offer levels whilst seeking to improve interview/audition attendances and conversion rates and reducing the number of withdrawn applications;
- Increasing research on applicant profiles to better understand needs;
- Delivering a sector-leading applicant experience through an established customer journey using relevant communication channels and creating 'moments that matter';
- Ensuring staff and systems are geared to offering a memorable 'end-to-end' experience to every applicant.

In discussion, the Chair and members raised a number of issues:

- .01 *Whether the University's approach to offer levels gave the best return:* The Director of Student Recruitment and Administration noted the University's current standard offer level at ABB and drew attention to the evidence that accepting applicants with lower entry requirements had a negative impact on retention rates. The Vice-Chancellor also indicated that lowering entry

requirements would undermine the University's reputation which would have a longer-term damaging effect on recruitment;

- .02 *The reason for the higher level of decline in application rates compared to competitors:* The Vice-Chancellor highlighted that subject mix was an important factor in this regard with applications to Nursing having experienced a significant drop following the government's withdrawal of the bursary scheme (although demand remained sufficiently high to sustain recruitment). Nevertheless, aggressive competitor behaviour was having an impact and the University needed to concentrate on improving conversion rates to ameliorate this;
- .03 *Whether the University was too regionally focused:* The Director of Student Recruitment and Administration confirmed that around 65% of students were currently drawn from the region although this varied significantly by programme. He indicated that the University held very detailed data on feeder schools which was used to inform targeted recruitment activity. Efforts were being made to boost the return from schools where current supply was low through building stronger relationships and the use of interns. In response to a member's question, he indicated that the initial approach was to develop a relationship with the University and then to foster subject links. The Vice-Chancellor reported that, in addition to intensifying work in the region, the University was also seeking to expand potential in areas such as Staffordshire and the West Midlands.
- .04 *Whether developing a specific strategy for supporting Clearing applicants would allow the University to profit more from this pool:* The Director of Student Recruitment and Administration suggested that the lack of any prior relationship with the University made this a particularly risky group to work with and that more benefit could be obtained from accepting applicants who had already shown a commitment to the University but had just missed their offer grades. The Vice-Chancellor indicated that this approach was now commonly adopted across the sector leading to fewer, and less well qualified, applicants in Clearing in any event with all the attendant issues previously identified in accepting students with lower grades;
- .05 *The nature of the ratio between A level and BTEC applicants and any implications:* The Director of Student Recruitment and

Administration reported that, whilst A level applicants remained the largest single source of applicants, there was consistent growth in the BTEC market. The University was aware that academic performance varied across subject areas in relation to this group and was monitoring the position carefully. The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) indicated that the need to ensure a level playing field for assessment was recognised in the development of assessment strategies.

Concluding discussion, the Chair thanked the Director of Student Recruitment and Administration for his informative presentation which had stimulated an interesting debate.

BG.17.093 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest specific to the meeting.

BG.17.094 Chair's Announcements

.01 Meeting with the Students' Union

The Chair indicated that he had held the second of his biannual meetings with the President of the Students' Union earlier in the day with a useful discussion focusing on the nature of the student contribution to the Board. The President of the Students' Union would elaborate further in his report later in the meeting.

BG.17.095 Chair's Action

.01 OfS Registration

The Chair reported that, given the imposed timescales, he had taken Chair's Action to approve the University's registration submission but that a full discussion was invited in relation to the documentation which was itemised as a later agenda item.

BG.17.096 Minutes of the previous meeting

Received: Document BG/065/17

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 March 2018 were agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

In response to a request from the Clerk for feedback in relation to the style of minuting, the Chair indicated that the new format properly reflected the nature of discussions at the Board.

BG.17.097 Action Log

In noting the actions arising from the previous meetings, the Clerk reported that a tour of the Faculty of Health and Social Care facilities had taken place immediately prior to the Board meeting and that the International Strategy and development of the next Strategic Plan remained active as future agenda items. Attention was drawn to the Medical School bid paper to HEFCE which had been circulated to all members and it was noted that Professor Clare Austin would be invited to present to the July Board meeting to provide a progress report. The Vice-Chancellor highlighted the limited associated costs for the development (£2.5 million) as outlined in the paper and covering a range of items. It was further noted that VAT would be recoverable in some instances.

The Action Log was **received**.

BG.17.098 Matters arising not included elsewhere on the agenda

.01 New Governor Recruitment

The Clerk reported that, despite significant efforts through Human Resources, response to date had been disappointing, especially in relation to the emphasis on increasing the Board's diversity, and members were reminded that direct nominations could also be considered.

A member suggested that it might be useful to contact the organisation currently supporting the University's School Governor Training programme.

Action: Clerk

SECTION A ITEMS

BG.17.099 Students' Union Election Report

Received: Document BG/067/17

The Board received a report from the President of the Students' Union confirming that the recent elections had been conducted in a fair and democratic manner.

BG.17.100 Minutes of Committees

.01 Resources Committee (23 April 2018)

Received: Document BG/068/17

The Chair of Resources introduced the minutes from the additional meeting held on 23 April drawing attention to the following items:

.01 Alder Hey Collaborative Proposal

The Vice-Chancellor indicated that no further communication had been received since the Resources meeting and, whilst this was disappointing, he was confident that the proposal would go ahead.

.02 Woodlands Campus

The Vice-Chancellor reported that all University staff had been relocated to the Ormskirk campus and the site was now largely closed although it appeared that a small number of local authority staff were maintaining a presence. A proposal to buy out the University's interest had been received but had been considered too low to accept. Any proposal to develop the land would require further negotiation with the University in any event.

.03 LRC Refurbishment

The Chair of Resources summarised the bid for this project which was itemised for discussion later in the meeting. He highlighted that the refurbishment would provide enhanced departmental space and would allow for a number of subsequent, smaller rationalisations to take place including the designation of the LINC building as the location for the Medical School.

Overall, whilst there was no specific investment payback, Resources Committee had viewed this proposal as a strategic investment which would benefit the student experience and had recommended it to the Board for approval.

Noting that the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Dean of Arts and Sciences) had been present at the meeting, the Resources Committee minutes were **received**.

SECTION B ITEMS

BG.17.101 Vice-Chancellor's Report

Received: Document BG/069/17

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

- Thanks were recorded to staff who had contributed to compiling the OfS registration documentation, especially given the very short timescale for completion;
- The University had slipped a few places in the 'Good University Guide' largely due to a weaker NSS result last year and the double weighting applied to research metrics. It was hoped the NSS position would improve this year (the recent 'What Uni' survey was encouraging) and it was noted that the 2021 REF submission was expected to further enhance the position in the future. The Vice-Chancellor emphasised however that achieving consistently better results in national rankings (which would have a positive impact on recruitment) depended on excellent performance across all areas;
- The Vice-Chancellor and the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) were visiting all departments to discuss the detail of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) requirements and the importance of maintaining the current 'gold' award status. This was particularly useful in understanding the challenges for staff;
- Retention remained a key area for the University and further improvement was sought. The Vice-Chancellor particularly highlighted the negative impact of 'drop-out' on individuals and their subsequent life-chances;

- Results from the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey were impressive and showed a further improvement in the number of Edge Hill students employed in graduate level jobs although it was noted that this survey was due to be withdrawn for future years;
- The financial outturn for 17/18 suggested a surplus of around £16 million but the position for 18/19 was likely to be considerably lower at around £10 million given smaller cohorts and rising employment costs;
- On the plus side, confirmation had been received that government were not withdrawing the QTS designation at present, the University had successfully negotiated an arduous process which granted eligibility for American students to study at Edge Hill supported with state aid and the University had been shortlisted by Advance HE for a global teaching award.

In discussion, members raised issues around retention and recruitment:

- .01 The University's analysis of the reasons for current retention levels, especially given high points score entrants:* The Vice-Chancellor pointed out that the University performed well on this measure in comparison to other Universities but that it was still essential to look for further improvement at key points such as end of year assessment. In terms of entry qualifications, he noted that BTEC students fared less well than A level students and that ensuring first year curriculum alignment with BTEC was important. The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) indicated that analysis of the reasons for drop-out was complex and that, given the profile of student intake at Edge Hill, many students faced barriers of one kind or another which the University was alert to. She highlighted that a new appointment had been made to further support retention work. The President of the Students' Union confirmed that student support services at the University were good;
- .02 The role of peer mentoring:* It was noted that peer mentoring from second to first year students could be particularly effective as a support for students but was dependent on departments operating the scheme well. The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) reported that an audit of the operation of peer mentoring systems

had been requested for the next meeting of the Learning and Teaching Committee in order to identify any specific challenges. In response to a member's query, it was noted that peer mentoring was also used in the recruitment process for some applicants;

.03 *Actions taken to support student engagement during the recruitment process:* The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) reported that the University was participating in 'The Big Read' initiative this year to encourage engagement and build a sense of community during the first weeks of arrival. All students who meet their offer will be sent a personalised copy of the chosen book (*Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine*) and asked to read it. A range of Firstweek activities will be centred on this shared reading. In response to members' queries as to whether this might be perceived as 'gimmicky' or whether the chosen book would be appropriate for all students, it was noted that this was a pilot year and the experience would be evaluated in terms of its success.

The Pro Vice-Chancellor (External Relations) emphasised the importance of making visits to campus a memorable experience generating 'moments that matter' in order to build affinity.

Concluding discussion, the Vice-Chancellor's report was received.

BG.17.102 Students' Union Report

The President of the Students' Union reported that, following discussions within the team about the student role on the Board, it had been agreed that future reports would focus on aspects of the student experience rather than the operation of the Students' Union per se. He highlighted the recent SU report on Value for Money as illustrative of the kind of report likely to be brought to the Board in future. As a consequence of the decision taken it was noted that the General Manager of the Students' Union would no longer attend Board meetings as a matter of course but as and when required. The President of the Students' Union indicated that information about campaigns and other aspects of Union activity were noted in the regular Newsletter which could be accessed on the web and he extended an open invitation to all Governors to visit the Students' Union at any time.

The report from the President of the Students' Union was received and noted.

BG.17.103 Capital Bid

Received: Document BG/070/17

Noting the extensive discussion at Resources Committee, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor briefly outlined the bid proposal for refurbishment of the Learning Resource Centre (LRC) following the transfer of the Library to the new Catalyst building in June. He highlighted that the proposal was in line with the Estates Strategy and that, whilst the refurbishment would not lead directly to increased income from student fees, it did provide an opportunity to enhance the student experience through improved facilities and was expected to have an indirect effect on recruitment. The project provided an effective solution to a number of issues including the need to better accommodate growing departments with associated teaching and learning space, encouraging students to develop a sense of place and stronger departmental affinity which was important for retention. The subsequent release of other buildings would allow a number of other moves which would bring more overall campus coherence. These were low-cost and, although interrelated, were being treated as individual projects in their own right.

In comparison with a new build option, it was noted that refurbishment offered a value for money, time sensitive approach with costs met from cash. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor confirmed that the short timescale for preferred completion (14 weeks) was challenging which could affect tender prices but it was expected that further negotiation should be possible.

In discussion, members raised the following queries:

- .01 Alignment with the Estates Strategy:* The Chair of Resources indicated that the campus tour undertaken before the last meeting of Resources Committee had been very useful in providing a visual reference for the next stages of the Estates Strategy and how the follow-on projects from The LRC refurbishment came together to provide a high level of departmental coherence;
- .02 The level of risk associated with the project which appeared to be particularly high in relation to the timescale for completion:* The Deputy Vice-Chancellor indicated that the highest level of risk was

associated with the transfer of staff and materials from the LRC to the new Catalyst building since this would determine when refurbishment works could commence. It was noted however that, whilst the moves facilitated by the refurbishment programme would offer an enhanced experience for students, they were not critical to the operation of the University and could be delayed to a later date if necessary;

- .03 *The costs associated with the development of the new Medical School:* The Deputy Vice-Chancellor confirmed that the Medical School would be accommodated in the LINC building, which was adjacent to the Faculty of Health and Social Care, and that this building offered a high level of good quality, generic teaching space. The main costs associated with the development of the Medical School (as identified in the documentation circulated previously to all Board members), would lie in the provision of equipment. This had been costed and would be included in budget proposals as appropriate. It was further noted that this would also support interdisciplinary work in the Faculty.
- .04 *The flexibility, sustainability and accessibility of the refurbishment:* The President of the Students' Union sought assurance on these aspects. In response, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor confirmed that the architects had ensured maximum flexibility in the design of the generic teaching spaces alongside the subject specific spaces for Psychology and Law. Flexibility was always a key consideration given the life of buildings and their need to respond to different needs and uses over their economic life. Sustainability was a major focus in any refurbishment project and the University had taken the opportunity to utilize the latest technologies, particularly those that impacted on running costs and social impact. He also confirmed that the LRC would be compliant with the latest building regulations and requirements in terms of accessibility for students with disabilities.

In the light of the discussion, and taking account of the positive recommendation from Resources Committee, the proposal to refurbish the LRC was approved with a budget allocation of £6.5 million.

Action: Deputy Vice-Chancellor

BG.17.104 Capital Projects Update

Received: Document BG/071/17

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor introduced the report noting all projects were running largely to time and within budget. He highlighted the following points:

- The cash spend related to the Catalyst building which had been running behind due to weather-related delays was now beginning to come through in the figures;
- Public realm work was developing well. The next stage was awaiting earth-moving works;
- The Phase 13 residential development had been pulled back in response to student feedback in relation to noise but work was now about to commence. The project was still expected to complete on time.

In response to a member's query, it was noted that noise had not been an issue with respect to previous projects but this would be taken into account in future planning. It was also noted that the budget figures in the paper needed updating.

The Board **received** the Capital Projects Update report.

BG.17.105 OfS Regulatory Framework

Received: Document BG/072/17

The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) introduced the suite of papers which, together, represented the University's submission to the OfS for registration. It was noted that Universities with Medical Schools had been subject to an early submission date which had necessitated Chair's Action in terms of the approval of certain documents. The registration documentation included the following papers for approval:

- *The Access and Participation Plan*: It was noted that the principles underlying this had been approved at the last meeting;
- *Student Protection Plan*: A new condition on Universities to protect students against circumstances in which they would be unable to

complete their target award. Institutions are required to undertake a risk assessment against a number of scenarios and confirm the arrangements in place to ensure student completion. The Edge Hill assessment judged the risk against all scenarios to be low and it was not therefore necessary to identify specific plans;

- *Refund and Compensation Policy*: This was a new policy to support the Student Protection Plan (SPP) to be used in extremis in the event that, despite the SSP, a student is unable to complete their target award or there are additional costs associated with the provision of an acceptable alternative.

The following papers were included for information and completeness:

- *Self-assessment on compliance with Consumer Protection Law*;
- *Self-assessment of management and governance arrangements*.

The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) reported that, in compiling the evidence required, a number of areas for improvement had been identified and these would be kept under review as part of the ongoing registration requirement. The Vice-Chancellor indicated that this was a strong application which went beyond baseline requirements.

Members acknowledged the efforts of University officers in compiling the extensive documentation. The following points arose from comments/queries from members:

.01 Access and Participation Plan

- In response to a query from the President of the Students' Union, the University confirmed it would work with the Students' Union in relation to the development of the Student Ambassador scheme;
- In response to a member's comment, it was noted that, in future, more emphasis could be given to the fact that the tuition fee charged by the University was comprehensive – there were no hidden costs associated with study programmes;
- In response to a member's comment, it was agreed that the currency of BME terminology should be checked.

.02 Refund and Compensation Policy

- In response to a member's query on the need for independence within the process, it was noted that this policy had been scrutinised by the University's in-house solicitor. Whilst the procedures would be handled internally, any student dissatisfied with the outcome could use the complaints procedure which provided for a final, independent review through the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA).

.03 Confidentiality

- In response to a member's query it was noted that, whilst it was not expected that documentation would be made publicly available, the general approach taken had been shared with some other institutions who were preparing their submissions.

.04 Accommodation Costs

- It was noted that accommodation costs at the University were low. In response to a query from the student governor elect, the Vice-Chancellor confirmed that no decision had yet been made as to whether costs on the lowest priced student accommodation would be held at current rates.

Concluding discussion, it was noted that the paper on management and governance arrangements offered a useful summary for future reference.

The Board approved Chair's Action taken in respect of the submission of the OfS registration documentation and the specific approval of the Access and Participation Plan, the Student Protection Plan and the Refund and Compensation Policy.

To note: Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience)

BG.17.106 HAR and Supplementary Report

The Vice-Chancellor indicated that the Action Plan and general progress reports would be taken to Audit Committee.

Action: Clerk

The Vice-Chancellor also confirmed that the OfS Effectiveness Review scheduled for Autumn 2018 would be undertaken by an independent agency.

BG.17.107 Any other Business

On behalf of the Board, the Chair thanked Ben Whittle, Students' Union President, for his contributions to the Board over the year and wished him every success in his future career.

SECTION C ITEMS

BG.17.108 Draft Calendar 2018/19

Received: Document BG/073/17

The Clerk asked members to notify her of any issues in relation to the Calendar which would otherwise be confirmed at the next meeting.

BG.17.109 Academic Board minutes

Received: Document BG/074/17

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 March were received.

BG.17.110 Date and time of next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for 9 July 2018.