

BOARD OF GOVERNORSMinutes of the meeting held on 26 November 2018

Present

Clive Edwards	Independent member	Chair of the Board
Lesley Munro		Clerk to the Board
Martin Ainscough	Independent member	
Roy Bayfield	Support Staff member	Elected/Co-opted
Joe Bradford	Student member	Students' Union President
Julian Bucknall	Independent member	
John Cater	Ex-officio	Vice-Chancellor
Graeme Collinge	Independent member	Chair: Resources Committee
Christine Donnelly	Independent member	
Clive Elliott	Independent member	
Joanne Flitcroft	Independent member	
Lisa Greenhalgh	Independent member	Chair: Audit Committee
Fin McNicol	Independent member	
Luke Myer	Student member	Elected
Louise Robinson	Independent member	
Mike Rush	Independent member	
George Talbot	Academic staff member	Academic Board nominee
Margaret Williams	Independent member	

In attendance

Mark Allanson	PVC (External Relations)
Lynda Brady	PVC (Student Experience) & University Secretary
Steve Igoe	Deputy Vice-Chancellor
Helen Smallbone	Academic Registrar and Clerk Designate

Apologies

Paul Aplin	Academic staff member	Elected/Co-opted
Rob Green	Independent member	
Tony Rankin	Independent member	

The Chair welcomed Joanne Flitcroft to her first meeting of the Board.

BG.18.030 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest.

BG.18.031 Chair's Announcements

.01 Sabbatical Proposal

The Chair reported that the continuing impact of **Tony Rankin's** recent illness was preventing him from attending meetings and, in the circumstances, **it was agreed to offer a six month sabbatical** with the position to be reviewed at the end of May 2019. Members passed on their best wishes for a speedy recovery.

Action: Clerk

.02 Graduation

The Chair reminded members of the invitation to attend the Graduation ceremonies on Saturday 1 December 2018.

.03 Scholarships evening

The Chair reminded members of the invitation to attend the annual Scholarships evening on Thursday 13 December and the preceding drinks reception for the retired Chancellor, Professor Tanya Byron.

.04 HE briefing paper

The Chair commended the briefing paper from Eversheds Sutherland summarising the House of Commons report on Value for Money in HE which had been circulated to members by the Clerk.

.05 Governor Development

The Chair reminded members that a governor development session would take place during the afternoon prior to the Board meeting on 28 January and he asked members to ensure this was in their diaries. The Clerk confirmed that the session was for all governors and would be facilitated by consultants from the Leadership Foundation.

BG.18.032 Chair's Action

There was no Chair's Action to report.

BG.18.033 Minutes of the previous meeting

Received: Document BG/021/18

It was noted that Helen Smallbone had been omitted from the list of attendees for the 5.45 pm meeting and that the title for the Pro Vice-Chancellor (External Relations) on page 19 was incorrect. Subject to these amendments, the minutes of the meetings held on 24 September 2018 were agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

BG.18.034 Action Log

Received: Document BG/022/18

The Clerk introduced the log which identified action taken on decisions made by the Board at the last meeting (a typographical error was noted in the date shown for this). It was noted that the additional information requested by the Board in relation to collaborative provision, the OfS ongoing conditions Action Plan and further details regarding student mental health provision had been circulated. Discussing individual items, the Clerk confirmed that the January meeting would be set aside for discussion on the development of the University's new Strategic Plan and also that a group to consider IER preparation had been established. With respect to the advance approval given to Chair's Action if required in relation to the Access Agreement monitoring submission, it was noted that this was likely to occur in January.

.01 Provision of student advice services

The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) and the President of the Students' Union confirmed that discussion had taken place since the last meeting. It was noted that the increased number of students seeking advice on appeals which had been reported by the Students' Union at the last meeting had not been fully reflected in the number of actual appeals received suggesting that, having reflected on the advice/information received, not all students pursued this route. It was further noted that the most common reason for appeals was students not reporting mitigating circumstances at the appropriate time for them to be considered by Progression and Award Boards. The University was continuing to work with the Students' Union to raise student awareness of this issue.

The Action Log was received.

BG.18.035 Matters arising not included elsewhere on the agenda

.01 Phase 13 Residences (BG.18.026.02)

In response to a question from the President of the Students' Union, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor confirmed that compensation had been paid to students who had been inconvenienced by the snagging issues arising from the development which had now been fully resolved. A flat rate sum equivalent to two weeks' rent had been agreed with this money recouped by the University from the construction firm.

COMMITTEE MINUTES/REPORTS

BG.18.036 Resources Committee (15 October 2018)

Received: Document BG/023/18

The Chair of Resources Committee introduced the minutes drawing attention to the following items:

.01 Students' Union Financial Statements

Noting a positive narrative report in terms of activity over the year, the committee had been concerned at the lack of meaningful analysis provided in relation to the significant deficit reported. The Students' Union had therefore been asked to provide the revised budget that was being presented to the Board of Trustees for approval to the next meeting of Resources Committee as assurance that appropriate action was being taken to address the position.

The student governor reported that the planned meeting of the Board of Trustees in October had unfortunately been cancelled and the revised budget would now go to the next scheduled meeting in December. The President of the Students' Union reported that accounts for the year to date showed a much healthier position.

.02 Committee Effectiveness

The loss of two experienced independent governor members of the committee due to retirement from the Board had been noted with regret. This would need to be taken into account in determining the skills/expertise sought from the next recruitment round.

.03 HR Annual Report

The committee had noted the increase in the staffing establishment as a driver in pushing up staff costs (noted in the Financial Statements) and had sought (and received) assurances that this aspect of expenditure was being tightly controlled. This was an area of particular concern for the committee. In acknowledging the need for careful management, the Vice-Chancellor reported that a significant number of new posts were fractional and much of the increased pressure on the payroll arose from rising on-costs such as pension contributions.

Noting the additional costs arising from the amicable resolution of issues concerning the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS), the Deputy Vice-Chancellor also highlighted the likely 7.2% increase in employer contributions for the Teachers Pension Scheme (TPS) which would add costs of around £2 million per annum. He further reported that the University was already paying around £1 million per annum as an additional contribution towards the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) deficit.

In response to a member's question concerning the participation rate for the Staff Survey, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor confirmed this was high at 62%.

.04 Financial Statements

Following detailed discussion, the 2017/18 Financial Statements had been recommended to the Board for approval.

.05 Capital Projects

The committee had received an extremely positive report in relation to the various building projects undertaken through the year.

.06 Wrightington Collaboration

The Vice-Chancellor reported that, whilst the University remained interested in contributing to the proposed collaboration to deliver a new Research and Education Centre at Wrightington Hospital, no further University commitment would be made until the Trust could provide more certainty in sourcing the necessary additional funding which was proving challenging.

.07 Alder Hey Collaboration

The Vice-Chancellor reported that, following a long period of negotiation, the proposal to contribute to the delivery of a new Research and Education Centre, which had been previously approved by the Board, was nearing finalisation. A Memorandum of Understanding and a draft contract had been agreed including a schedule of guaranteed placements which would secure an income stream for the University. It was noted that the contract included an early termination clause which would ensure the repayment of costs to the University for any unexpired period.

.08 UCU Recognition Agreement

It was noted that the committee had approved a new Recognition Agreement with the University and Colleges Union (UCU).

The minutes from Resources Committee were received.

BG.18.037 Audit Committee (29 October 2018)

Received: Document BG/024/18

The Chair of Audit Committee introduced the minutes drawing attention to the following items:

- Assurance received in relation to the Student Journey project;
- The agreement of monitoring arrangements in relation to the development of the Medical School;
- A positive External Audit;
- Assurance received in relation to the operation of the Value for Money policy;
- Approval of the Audit Committee annual report and positive opinion;
- Approval of the Bribery and Anti-Corruption policy and Code of Conduct and the revised Hospitality and Gifts policy;
- Recommendation of the 2017/18 Financial Statements to the Board for approval.

In response to a member's query concerning the Student Journey project, it was noted that this had first come to the attention of the committee through the previous year's Value for Money (VfM) report which covered a variety of projects. The Student Journey project encompassed a wide range of university activity and was focused on providing a consistent framework for the way the University communicates, listens to and engages with students from their first

enquiry to the point of graduation. It was a multi-strand, long term project working across a number of Departments which required significant resource and it was on that basis that Audit Committee had sought Value for Money assurances and requested a presentation from the Director of Student Recruitment and Administration. It was noted that a number of positive outcomes from the project were already evident as a result of the work of the Student Experience function which had been established as an outcome of the project with more streamlined processes developed around student requirements. There had also been improvements to conversion rates and an impact on retention rates which were, in part, likely to be attributable to the work of the project. Audit committee members had been particularly impressed by the practical nature of the work and the specified VfM it delivered.

Following discussion, **it was agreed that a presentation to the full Board would be useful.**

Action: Clerk

The Audit Committee minutes were received.

BG.18.038 Remunerations Committee (15 October 2018)

Received: Document BG/025/18

The Chair of Remunerations Committee introduced the report noting that both the committee's annual report and the Framework for Staff Remuneration and Conditions of Service appeared as separate items later in the agenda.

The Clerk circulated copies of the pay and reward procedures for designated postholders which had been approved by the committee but omitted in error from the circulation of papers.

In response to a member's question about the attendance of the Vice-Chancellor at meetings, it was noted that the Vice-Chancellor was not a member of the committee but attended in an advisory capacity as requested by the Chair. The Vice-Chancellor was never present for discussions concerning his own position. Attendance in an advisory capacity was in line with sector practice.

The report from Remunerations Committee was received.

SECTION A ITEMS

BG.18.039 Vice-Chancellor's Report

Received: Document BG/026/18

The Vice-Chancellor introduced his report noting the following points:

.01 Applications

The demographic downturn was continuing to affect application rates nationally with increased competition and a swathe of negative press stories increasing the pressures on recruitment. Matching brand recognition to the University's standing in relation to learning and teaching and student support was a challenging but increasingly important priority. There had been a welcome addition in paramedic training numbers and there were signs that recent open days and activities around the Student Journey project were having a positive impact, but a smaller intake for the traditional three year undergraduate programmes in 2019 was a real possibility.

.02 Retention

Whilst retention rates were high in comparison with sector norms, retaining students remained a key priority in terms of the impact on student lives, securing income for the University and enhancing the potential to maintain TEF Gold status. Initial indications for this year were positive. The Vice-Chancellor indicated that the capacity to retain students beyond graduation through to Masters programmes could also be further enhanced.

.03 Budget

It was likely that the University would be able to improve on the projected surplus of £10 million for 2018/19 which would provide some headroom but, with the increases in costs already noted, and the need to continue to support the student experience, the position for future years was much less certain.

.04 Government policy

The outcome of the Augar Review would have a significant impact on universities with the possibility of lower tuition fee rates and no guarantees that this would be topped up by government. The existing model of student funding was under threat in any event

with the Office for National Statistics likely to report that the current accounting methodology for student loans was unsustainable. Recent press stories had indicated a number of universities were already experiencing financial difficulties and a statement from the Chair of OfS had made it clear that there would be no 'bail-out'.

Concluding his report, the Vice-Chancellor emphasised the planning challenge presented by the current environment and noted that the impact of the 18-21 demographic dip was unlikely to improve markedly until 2022/23. Nevertheless, the University was well placed financially and a continued focus on quality could see another rise in league table positions helping to drive a necessary increase in the market share of applications.

The Vice-Chancellor's report provoked a lively discussion with all members participating. In response to a specific question from the Chair about the University's response if recruitment continued to be a cause for concern, the Vice-Chancellor reported that, whilst the University was resourcing wider market penetration efforts, there was also a need for more activity focused on key feeder institutions. He also reported that the University had engaged Data HE Ltd., a private company specialising in HE strategic data analysis and marketing, to undertake a portfolio analysis to guide the future development of provision.

Given the range of significant risks facing the University however members expressed a particular interest in how the University planned for 'what if' scenarios and suggested that this should be more visible to the Board. Members also noted that, in looking towards the development of the University's next Strategic Plan, it would be important for this to incorporate an analysis of major risks in setting the direction of travel and identifying the appropriate KPIs to monitor progress. Whilst it was acknowledged that the Board already considered risk through a range of mechanisms such as the sensitivity analysis in the budget and the regular risk reports received at Audit committee which were summarised in the Board's KPI report, there was strong support for all of this to be brought together for a full discussion at Board level given the Board's responsibilities for strategic direction.

Following discussion, **it was agreed that the January meeting, which had been set aside to discuss the development of the University's**

next Strategic Plan, should focus on the impact of major risks on the nature and shape of the plan. The use of scenario planning was suggested by a member as an approach that could be usefully explored and would accommodate the development of a plan with the inbuilt flexibility identified as essential by the Vice-Chancellor.

Action: Clerk/Executive

In relation to the risks surrounding Health provision, it was noted that the University already cultivated strong relationships with the Health Commissioning Boards. A member suggested that making direct contact with General Practitioner services might also be beneficial.

BG.18.040 Student Report

The President of the Students' Union updated the Board on student dissatisfaction with the parking facilities at the University – a matter which had attracted over 3,000 signatures. He indicated that the Union had been working collaboratively with the University on this issue and a position statement had been released explaining the challenges and the positive actions taken but a high level of dissatisfaction remained. Focus groups had been established to seek to identify any further action which could be taken.

The Vice-Chancellor indicated that the University was limited by the local Council in the number of parking places offered with one space allowed for every two members of staff and one for every fifteen students in accordance with national planning guidance. Some additional temporary parking was allowed for a limited number of days to cover peak periods. It was noted that the University operated a comprehensive Green Travel Plan which encouraged car-sharing, cycling and the use of public transport. Some street parking was available and there were also facilities in town with a free bus service to the University running every 15 minutes. Whilst the start of term was always a challenging period, in general, the situation was less pressured this year. It was also the case that a number of students chose to park on the verges (where they could be ticketed) rather than take a legitimate space at the far end of the campus.

The Vice-Chancellor further reported that enquiries had been made into the potential to build a multi-storey car park but the costings for this were prohibitive at around £15 million and would bring into question whether this was an appropriate use of public money.

In response to a member's question as to whether the introduction of charging could ameliorate the position, the Vice-Chancellor referred to studies which had shown that prices would need to be set at a very high level to influence behaviour. Further promotion of car-sharing could be explored.

The Board noted the position.

BG.18.041 Remunerations Committee Annual Report

Received: Document BG/027/18

The Chair of Remunerations Committee introduced the report which set out the approach and operating principles adopted in relation to remuneration in general across the University and provided specific information on the processes for determining the pay and reward for designated senior postholders including the specific pay details for the Vice-Chancellor. It was noted that this was the first annual report from the committee and that it had been developed with reference to the relevant CUC guidance.

A member suggested that **the inclusion of comparative data** in relation to the Vice-Chancellor's salary would be useful in future reports. It was noted that this was taken into account by the committee in reaching its decisions.

Action: Clerk

The Chair of Remunerations Committee noted a small discrepancy between the Vice-Chancellor's salary quoted in this report and that shown in the Financial Statements. The Clerk drew attention to the footnote which indicated that the figure in the Financial Statements included an on-cost allocation in respect of the apprenticeship levy.

The annual report from Remunerations Committee was received.

BG.18.042 Going Concern (ASSUR) Statement

Received: Document BG/028/18

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor introduced this statement noting that, whilst it had been produced for many years for submission to HEFCE,

OfS had now indicated it was no longer required. He noted however that the data, which covered a wide range of sustainability indicators, was useful in providing the Board with assurance and it was therefore presented for information.

The Going Concern (ASSUR) Statement was received.

BG.18.043 Auditors' Letter of Representation

Received: Document BG/029/18

The Chair of Audit Committee introduced the letter of representation noting that this followed a standard format and there were no issues, other than the one matter relating to the carrying value of Woodlands, to bring to the attention of the Board. It was noted that clause 4 had been updated in the final draft for signature and confirmed that no uncorrected misstatements had been identified.

The Board approved the Auditor's Letter of Representation for signature by the Chair.

Action: Chair

BG.18.044 Audit Committee Report for the year ended 31 July 2018 and External Audit Letter

Received: Document BG/030/18

The Chair of Audit introduced the report which outlined the business of the committee over the year and the assurance taken from the various reports, audits and presentations considered. The report referenced unqualified opinions from both internal and external audit and the committee's positive opinion with respect to the adequacy and effectiveness of the arrangements for governance, risk management, internal control, VfM and the management and quality assurance of data. It was noted by a member of the committee that the consideration of business in the committee was both detailed and robust.

In response to a member's question concerning the discount rate as applied to pensions, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor explained that this was the rate used to value the current cost of future pension obligations and was derived from applying the expected rate of return

from risk free investments over the long term. It was noted that University staff mainly belonged to either the Teacher's Pension Scheme (TPS) or the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS). The University was an admitted member of both these schemes which were open to large numbers of employers with liability shared accordingly. The Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) was a private scheme set up by pre-92 universities with a small number of Edge Hill staff in membership. The note from the external auditors confirmed that the discount rates applied by the University, taken alongside the overall set of assumptions, were within an acceptable range.

The Audit Committee Report and External Audit Letter were received.

BG.18.045 Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2018

Received: Document BG/031/18

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor introduced the Statements noting these had been discussed in detail at both Resources and Audit Committees with positive recommendations for approval and had received a clean Audit. He drew attention to the following points:

- a higher than projected surplus at £13.985 million and a strong cash position;
- the enhanced disclosure relating to the Vice-Chancellor's emoluments and the remuneration for other higher paid staff which was in line with OfS requirements;
- the valuation with respect to the Woodlands campus which was not material and was not a cash item;
- total comprehensive income was £33.9m however the actuarial gain disclosed in the accounts and interest and other costs also disclosed were £2.852m higher than the accounts version considered by Resources Committee following the re-classification and enhanced disclosure of an element of pension costs following discussion with the auditors.

In confirming Resources Committee's recommendation for the approval of the Financial Statements, the Chair of Resources Committee highlighted the largely static income line and the significant increase in staff costs, with investment in new posts noted in the accounts, and the obvious concerns this raised. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor indicated that investment in posts to develop and deliver new areas of work was

essential for the long term sustainability of the University. He reported that there was also disinvestment in areas where demand was falling but there was a time lag for this to show whilst the necessary 'teach out' arrangements were completed. It was also noted that, as a proportion of income, staff costs were still below the median for the sector.

Following discussion, members were comfortable that some 'front-loading' was necessary for new provision and it was accepted that other staff costs to support the increased costs of compliance and additional resource for student mental health were justified. It was noted however that such rises were not sustainable year on year and the Vice-Chancellor and Deputy Vice-Chancellor gave their assurance that this was being carefully managed with all posts, new and replacement, subject to specific approval from the Vice-Chancellor.

In response to a member's question about income generating activities, it was noted that this related to areas such as Sporting Edge which made a charge for the public use of facilities.

A member noted that the requirement to include the actuarial gain in respect of pension schemes within the published surplus could present a misleading picture to the outside world and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor confirmed that the University was well prepared to answer any enquiries received about this.

Noting the positive recommendations from Resources Committee and Audit Committee, **it was RESOLVED to approve the Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2018 and for these to be signed and submitted to OfS.**

Action: Chair/Deputy Vice-Chancellor

BG.18.046 PREVENT Duty Annual Report

Received: Document BG/032/18

The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) & University Secretary introduced the report which followed the new, slimmed down, format specified by OfS. The report outlined the University's commitment to Freedom of Speech which was supported by a policy and Code of Practice operating on the basis of exception with only those events deemed 'controversial' being referred for approval. There had been no

referrals through the process this year nor had there been any incidents relating to individuals identified through the Safeguarding policy process. The risk assessment process had been reviewed and the ongoing training requirement had been met. Updated figures on the number of staff who had received training were provided to the Board. It was noted that the University PREVENT lead was actively engaged with the national and regional agenda and that the PREVENT Regional Co-ordinator had visited the University to provide an update briefing. The Co-ordinator was scheduled to speak to Board members at the March 2019 meeting. It was also noted that further resource had been allocated to the chaplaincy service.

With respect to the associated data return, the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) & University Secretary highlighted a new requirement to provide statistics in relation to the number of students accessing welfare provision and to identify any relationship to PREVENT issues. This had been introduced to provide added confidence that vulnerable students were being appropriately supported. It was noted that most Universities did not currently categorise data in this way and OfS had agreed that data could be submitted in the format held by the University with an associated narrative.

In response to a member's question as to whether the PREVENT duty applied to staff as well as students, it was noted that the duty applied specifically to students but that the awareness training that was being rolled out was applicable to all members of the university community.

The student governor indicated that, whilst the Students' Union complied with the relevant policies and procedures concerning Freedom of Speech, neither the NUS nor Edge Hill Students' Union supported the government's PREVENT reporting programme as an effective means of preventing radicalisation. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) & University Secretary confirmed that the University's approach was geared to identifying support needs.

Having considered the report, the Board agreed it had provided the necessary assurance and **it was RESOLVED to approve the annual PREVENT report for signing and submission to the OfS.**

**Action: Chair/Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) &
University Secretary**

BG.18.047 Academic Assurance Report

Received: Document BG/033/18

(Discussion taken earlier in the meeting)

The Director of Quality Assurance introduced the report which outlined the University's academic quality processes and outcomes for the 2017/18 academic year. He drew attention to the following points:

- This was the second annual report to the Board and followed the format approved by the Board in 2017;
- Part One of the document described the quality strategy and processes (such as programme approval, monitoring and review) as they operated at the University. These were unchanged from the report made in 2017;
- Part Two related to outcomes from the processes from which it was noted that:
 - All final awards to students had been made in compliance with the University's Academic Regulations;
 - A number of new courses, such as the BSc in Robotics and Artificial Intelligence, had been approved for delivery;
 - All external examiners had confirmed that academic standards had been met with only two comments made which required action, both of which had been addressed;
 - All academic departments had been subject to annual monitoring (regular healthcheck) or periodic review (full medical) with panels considering evidence covering academic standards, the quality of the student learning experience, student recruitment, retention and attainment, graduate employability and student engagement. It was noted that, as part of the periodic review process, panels met both with groups of students and employers. The Action Plans resulting from these processes were largely for local implementation but any University level issues were referred on and a copy of the University level Action Plan for 2018/19 was attached to the report along with an update on the actions agreed for 2017/18;
 - A number of programme closure approvals had been agreed with appropriate arrangements in place to ensure the maintenance of standards and the quality of the student learning experience during the 'teach-out' period;
 - The first appendix to the report highlighted a number of other documents considered by the Board over the year, such as

the NSS and First Destination reports, which provided further assurance in relation to the maintenance of standards and the quality of the student learning experience.

Concluding his report, the Director of Quality Assurance indicated that the Board could have confidence in the University's quality assurance processes, their operation and outcome.

In discussion, members raised the following queries/issues:

.01 The Role of External Examiners

The Chair queried the role of external examiners in the ratification of individual student awards and the Academic Registrar clarified that external examiners were generally appointed to modules where their role lay in the confirmation of standards and the appropriateness of marks awarded. A smaller number of external examiners were appointed to Progression and Award Boards where consideration was given to the whole student profile and their role in this process was to confirm the proper application of the academic regulations and to advise on borderline cases.

.02 The absence of student retention as an issue in the University Action Plan

A member expressed some surprise that this was not specifically picked out as an issue for consideration at University level given its importance both in relation to the student experience and to the University more generally. It was noted however that the action with respect to early leavers was relevant in this regard and that any specific concerns at Departmental level would be highlighted in local Action Plans;

.03 Student Satisfaction levels

Whilst acknowledging the generally high levels of student satisfaction referenced in the report (and as evidenced through a number of other reports to the Board), it was noted that this was based on an averaging process and a member queried whether some more critical analysis of departmental performance should be included in future, perhaps through use of a traffic light system, to reflect trends over time and actions taken to address any particular concerns. The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) indicated that the departmental annual monitoring process was rigorous in identifying areas of concern and requiring an appropriate action plan to be developed and implemented.

She noted that, in relation to the Media Department, which had been noted by the Board as performing less well than other departments in the NSS, a new Head of Department had been appointed and was already making a difference with a review of the curriculum and associated modules, revision of the management structure in the department and implementation of a strong staff development programme.

The student governor indicated that, whilst the NSS was important as a measure of student satisfaction, the Students' Union also operated a comprehensive course representative system through which issues could be raised and resolved.

.04 Grade Inflation

The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) drew attention to the recent negative publicity around what had been termed 'grade inflation' with the relatively rapid increase in the numbers of first class honours awarded across the sector in recent years. She noted that the Academic Registrar was actively involved both nationally with UUK and as Chair of a professional group in investigating this issue and a specific group had been established at Edge Hill to look at the evidence supporting grade increases. The Academic Registrar noted that publication of the UUK report was expected in the next few days and some recommendations were anticipated which would have an impact on some operational practices in the sector. She indicated that future reports to Academic Board and the Board of Governors would include more detail on the evidence to support practice at Edge Hill in order to provide assurance on this aspect.

In general discussion, the link governor to Academic Board confirmed that the University Action Plan arising from annual monitoring and periodic review was actively discussed and followed up.

Concluding discussion, members agreed that the annual quality report, coupled with other reports received over the year, provided the necessary assurance required in relation to the maintenance of academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience.

It was noted however that future reports should include more critical analysis of performance and acknowledgement of areas where improvement was expected.

Action: Director of Quality Assurance

BG.18.048 2018 Annual Accountability Return to OfS

Received: Document BG/034/18

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor introduced the annual return noting that this had been significantly trimmed back by OfS from the previous HEFCE template. The return was in three parts. Part 1 provided confirmation that the University had complied with HEFCE/OfS funding requirements and the Research Concordat, Part 2 provided for confirmation of the maintenance of academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience and Part 3 provided for confirmation that the University had complied with the relevant charity legislation. In a change from previous years, all three parts were to be signed by the accountable officer (the Vice-Chancellor) signing on behalf of the governors for Parts 2 and 3. In addition to the three part return, a statement of significant movements comparing 2017/18 with the September forecast submission was included as required.

In relation to the Transparent Approach to Costing (TRAC) returns, it was noted that the submission dates for these fell outside scheduled meeting dates for Audit Committee and the Board was asked to approve the use of Chair's Action (Audit) if it was not possible to agree separate arrangements with OfS.

Noting the previous assurances received, **the Board RESOLVED to approve the 2018 Annual Accountability Return for submission to OfS and agreed Chair's Action (Audit), if required, in relation to the TRAC returns.**

Action: Vice-Chancellor/Deputy Vice-Chancellor

BG.18.049 Student Discipline, Complaints and Appeals Report

Received: Document BG/035/18

The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) introduced the report which was produced to provide assurance in relation to the governance and management of these areas in terms of the student experience. She noted that the report also demonstrated compliance with a number of the OfS conditions of registration especially as they related to co-operation with the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) with respect to student complaints and appeals. She further noted that operational processes were mapped against OIA good practice

guidelines. Referring to a comment made in discussion of the 2016/17 report, the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) apologised for the lack of equality and diversity analysis and confirmed that this would be included in future reports.

.01 Complaints

Whilst there had been a small rise in the number of complaints overall, more of these had been resolved at the informal stage with only three students taking their case to the formal review level. Given the small numbers involved, there were no identifiable generic themes to be drawn from the data.

.02 Appeals

The number of academic appeals submitted had risen with 70% upheld. The majority of these related to the late submission of mitigating circumstances and, as discussed previously in the meeting, the University was working with the Students' Union to ensure the process for submitting mitigating circumstances was better understood. All personal tutors had also received training on this issue. In response to a query from the student governor, the Academic Registrar confirmed that a more detailed analysis of the reasons underlying the mitigating circumstances submitted by students could be provided in future.

.03 Office of the Independent Adjudicator

The number complaints received at the OIA from Edge Hill students (6) was below the median for similar sized institutions (12.5) and, of those considered, only two had been found partly justified. The annual statement from the OIA noted the University's timely compliance with its recommendations and commended the University's positive engagement with the OIA's outreach programme.

.04 Student Discipline

The report on student discipline showed a marked rise in the number of cases being dealt with although the number of serious sanctions applied had reduced. It was noted that this was largely due to the increased reporting of low-level incidents (such as noise) arising from the increased number of students living on campus and improved reporting procedures. The approach adopted by the University in relation to enforcing discipline was to raise awareness of personal responsibility for behaviour with those concerned rather than through the application of sanctions.

The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) reported that a new role had been approved for a student cases officer within Academic Registry which would bring together the management of complaints, appeals, student discipline and fitness to practice issues to provide a more holistic service to students.

The annual report on Student Discipline, Complaints and Appeals was received.

BG.18.050 Framework for Staff Remuneration and Conditions of Service

Received: Document BG/036/18

The Chair of Remunerations Committee indicated that this document, developed in consultation with the Director of Human Resources, set out the principles and major provisions relating to the Board's responsibilities for setting a framework for staff pay and conditions of service and was recommended for approval.

It was noted that there was an incomplete sentence at clause 4 which should read "All posts on the national single pay spine are evaluated using the University's agreed HERA scheme."

Subject to this amendment, **it was RESOLVED to approve the Framework for Staff Remuneration and Conditions of Service.**

Action: Director of Human Resources

BG.18.051 Key Performance Indicators

Received: Document BG/037/18

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor introduced the report and noted the update on a number of the KPIs which were drawn from the Strategic Plan. He highlighted the improved NSS performance, the high percentage of staff rating the University as a good or excellent employer and the improved ranking in the Times and Sunday Times League Table. It was also noted that the University had been included in the Times Higher Education Global University rankings for the first time. There were no issues of concern to report.

In relation to the indicator for the percentage of staff undertaking performance review, a member suggested this should be more

realistically set at amber to reflect the declining level of participation. It was also noted that the report would benefit from the addition of page numbers.

To note: Director of Strategic Planning

The Key Performance Indicator report was received.

SECTION B ITEMS

BG.18.052 Management Information August/September 2018

Received: Document BG/038/18

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor introduced the management accounts which provided early information on performance in relation to the budget. He noted that overall recruitment numbers had been a little better than projected and that there had been good savings in relation to expenditure suggesting that the final surplus for the year would increase from the budgeted position.

A member queried whether the overspends identified were a cause for concern and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor responded that these were generally profile related and would diminish as the year progressed.

The August/September management information was received.

BG.18.053 Edge Hill Enterprises: Rental Agreements for the use of facilities

Received: Document BG/039/18

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor noted that Edge Hill Enterprises managed the University's sports facilities on behalf of the University under specified contract arrangements. As the facilities were wholly owned University assets, a formal licence to occupy was required and the rental agreements were renewed on an annual basis.

The rental agreements for the use of facilities were noted.

BG.18.054 Independent Effectiveness Review Update

The Vice-Chancellor reported that, following the notification of the appointment of the consultant for the effectiveness review, a range of

documentation had been requested and supplied including a copy of the HAR Action Plan detailing the steps taken by the University to ensure compliance with the recommendations. A schedule of interviews had been agreed and these included senior governors, members of the executive, the Clerk, the Academic Registrar and both past and current Internal Auditors. Interviews were scheduled to take place on 6 and 10 December whilst the final report was anticipated by the end of January.

It was suggested that some of the material compiled for the review could be usefully shared amongst all members.

Action: Clerk

The update report on the IER was received.

BG.18.055 Any other business

There was no other business.

SECTION C ITEMS

BG.18.056 Letter from PwC

Received: Document BG/040/18

The Board received a letter from PwC confirming that, on ceasing their position as Internal Auditors for the University, there were no issues to bring to the Board's attention.

BG.18.057 Date and time of next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for 28 January 2019 and will be preceded by a governor development session which will commence at 1.00 pm. A buffet lunch will be available from 12.30 pm.