

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Minutes of the meeting held on 15 May 2023

Present

Clive Elliott	Independent member	Chair of the Board
Ben Broadhurst	Student member	
Julian Bucknall	Independent member	
John Cater	Ex-Officio	Vice-Chancellor
Graeme Collinge	Independent member	
Christine Donnelly	Independent member	
Amanda Fulford	Teaching staff member	Elected/Co-opted
Lauren King	Student member	
Antony Lockley	Independent member	
Maxine Melling	Independent member	
Jo Nettleton	Independent member	
Mike Tate	Independent member	Chair: Audit Committee

In attendance

Mark Allanson	Pro Vice-Chancellor (External Relations)	
Lynda Brady	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) & University Secretary	
Steve Igoe	Deputy Vice-Chancellor	
Paul Malone	Chief Executive, EHSU	
Jane Moore	Pro Vice-Chancellor and Dean of Education	<i>For agenda item BG.22.102</i>
Rhona Morris	Governance, Projects & Policy Manager	Secretariat

Apologies

Louise Robinson	Independent member	Vice Chair of the Board
Mike Rush	Independent member	
Helen Smallbone	Clerk to the Board	

BG.22.094 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

BG.22.095 Chair's Announcements

.01 Andy Jackson

Due to personal circumstances, the Support Staff Governor has resigned from the Board. Governors noted Andy's commitment to the University and offered him their best wishes for the future.

The process to find a replacement Support Staff Governor will commence shortly.

.02 Academic Board nominee

The Academic Board has nominated Dr Leon Culbertson, Dean of the Graduate School to join the Board of Governors. Leon has worked at the University since 2000, undertaking significant roles in the development of research degrees since 2009. He has developed particular interests in regulatory activity, academic quality, and governance.

The Board was delighted to confirm Leon's appointment, and governors look forward to meeting him at his first meeting in June.

.03 Lancashire Community Climate Action Forum

The University will host the Lancashire Community Climate Action Forum on 17 May, which a number of governors plan to attend. The Chair noted that all Board members will be interested in their feedback from the event and asked attendees to consider how best to circulate this.

.04 Key successes

- The University won three awards at the Educate North Awards: widening participation, community engagement and external relations. The University was highly commended for student experience.

- Edge Hill was also awarded the Partnership of the Year award at the prestigious *Student Nursing Times* awards.

BG.22.096 Chair's Action

There was no Chair's Action to report.

BG.22.097 Minutes of the previous meeting

Received: Document BG/083/22

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2023 were agreed as an accurate record.

BG.22.098 Action Log

Received: Document BG/084/22

Members noted that all items had either been actioned or were in progress.

The Action Log was received.

BG.22.099 Matters arising not included elsewhere on the agenda

There were no matters arising.

SECTION A ITEMS

BG.22.100 Vice-Chancellor's Report

Received: Document BG/085/22

Reported: The Vice-Chancellor introduced his report by updating governors on the University's recruitment and retention figures, both of which had further improved since his report was circulated. He also updated members on the reception of his recent article for the Higher Education Policy Institute on the Shape of Higher Education in 2030.

Discussed: In response to questions, the following information was noted:

- *Industrial action*

[Exempt from publication – confidential]

- *Financial health of the sector*

A number of universities are in a precarious financial position, exacerbated by rising costs and a fixed tuition fee. The OfS has mechanisms to enable provider market exit, and to ensure that students are supported throughout the process. However, the decision to allow providers to fail is inherently political, and it is unlikely that some providers would be allowed to close. Edge Hill continues to be in robust financial health, though close attention will be required to ensure that this position continues.

- *Student retention*

The excellent position in relation to student retention has been supported by the University's early intervention model project. This has developed a cohesive set of support arrangements for those students considering leaving their programme. The PVC (Student Experience) & University Secretary noted that the project encourages academic tutors to identify a lack of engagement at an early enough stage to allow support to be offered and implemented when it could be most effective.

All students who decide to leave the University are asked for the reason for their departure. The results of these exit interviews are analysed by the Student Retention Network to identify trends. Additional investment in Student Services has enabled the University to offer practical support in the majority of cases, which has had a positive impact on retention.

The early intervention model project will continue into 2023/24. Its next stage will move from intervention to prevention, to identify and resolve potential barriers which are triggering non-engagement. In the meantime, the project team will review how the University communicates with students during vacation and interruption periods to ensure that we continue to inculcate the sense of belonging during fallow times.

- *League table positioning*

The University has made swift positive progress through national league tables over the last decade but is now in a position where it

will prove more challenging to continue this progress due to the quality of its peers. The Vice-Chancellor and Director of Student Recruitment and Administration have undertaken detailed analysis of local and national competitors to identify areas for potential relative improvement. The Chair confirmed that discussion of these matters would form a significant part of the next Strategy and Development Day. The Vice-Chancellor agreed to share his most recent strategy presentation to the Board via the Convene portal.

Action: Vice-Chancellor

- *'Uni-technic' model*
The Vice-Chancellor's Uni-technic model from his HEPI report had been well received by both the sector and ministers. Governors were particularly interested in the implications of working with a portfolio of partners. The Vice-Chancellor noted that the University has a wealth of experience of working with public services in health care and education, and that it was already developing its knowledge exchange activity, particularly in STEM subjects. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) provided an update on regional developments which will blend individual partnerships together through project-based work helping to ease the administrative burden.
- *Graduate outcomes*
The University's graduate outcomes continue to improve, however sector level data has not yet been received and therefore relative performance could not be assessed. The Employability Strategy requires all departments to set stretching targets and monitor performance. The University's academic portfolio will continue to have an impact on graduate outcomes data as arts and humanities subjects will always perform less well than those professional programmes which lead directly into graduate-level careers.

Agreed: To receive the Vice-Chancellor's Report.

BG.22.101 Student Report

Received: Document BG/086/22

Reported: The Students' Union (SU) nominee reported on work with colleagues in the Faculty of Education to develop high-quality data dashboards.

These will provide timely student insight for the SU's reports to both University committees and the Board of Governors. He also updated members on the interim arrangements to locate SU activities in the Arts Centre while building work is ongoing.

Discussed: In discussion, the following information was noted:

- *Student engagement with the SU*

The SU was alert to the success of the University of Sheffield's SU in recent surveys. As Sheffield's student body is considerably larger than Edge Hill's, its SU has a more complex structure and can generate more resources than we could achieve.

However, the Chief Executive of the SU noted that there were elements which could be emulated at Edge Hill. In particular, he suggested that the SU could be used as a single point of contact for students to access all student-facing activity. This ambitious aim for a more collaborative approach with the University would be at the heart of the SU's forthcoming Strategic Plan. The Student Governor welcomed this idea noting that, on a recent student panel she attended, students had identified community and connection without hierarchy as a key trait of a mentally-healthy University.

Agreed: To receive the Student Report.

BG.22.102 EDI Annual Report

[Clerk's note: item taken earlier in the meeting to allow for PVC Education to present the paper]

Received: Document BG/087/22

Reported: The Pro Vice-Chancellor and Dean of Education (PVC Education) introduced the report. She explained that it was presented in a new format following governors' feedback that the previous iteration focused too heavily on data rather than strategy. She welcomed comments on this new approach as well as the report's content.

The Lead Governor: EDI welcomed the report and the excellent progress made by the EDI Steering Group towards the targets identified in the EDI Strategy.

Discussed: In response to questions, the following information was noted:

- *Staff experience*

The University employs a range of mechanisms to assess and evaluate staff satisfaction. This includes the use of pulse surveys targeted to specific departments, teams or individual characteristics, to allow the University to gain insight into the issues faced at a local level. Where appropriate, working groups are established to further explore and resolve issues.

Staff are also actively engaged in EDI activity through various staff networks, and the EDI ambassador scheme. Governors encouraged the PVC Education to consider replicating with staff, the focus groups successfully used by the Access and Participation team to engage with students from under-represented groups.

- *Training and development*

The EDI Steering Group had given detailed consideration to appropriate training and development for staff. The PVC Education noted the importance of training reflecting the complexity of the issue and reflected on high-profile backlash where an overly simplistic model was adopted by other providers. A new training package has been developed and the PVC Education agreed to circulate details via the Secretariat.

Action: PVC Education

- *Strategic development*

Before the PVC Education's arrival in 2019, the University did not have a single over-arching strategy in place to articulate its EDI ambitions. In developing the EDI Strategy, the Steering Group has created a mature infrastructure to set targets and monitor progress. Due to the absence of articulated targets previously, there is some inconsistency in ambition between some current targets notably, those representing 'low hanging fruit' which were easily achieved, and others presenting more complex challenges.

Governors welcomed the significant progress made by the EDI Steering Group to date, particularly in drawing together multiple workstreams into a single coherent vision. The Board supports the Strategy's evolution and requested that the next annual report focuses on driving the University's ambition further - to include outcome-focused success measures and the strategic vision beyond the current timeframe. The Chair noted that colleagues

involved in the Steering Group did so on top of already busy roles. He asked the PVC Education to ensure that next year's report also includes consideration of the resourcing requirements for the future strategic aims.

Action: PVC Education

Governors were asked to send feedback on the report's format and any points of detail directly to the PVC Education by email, copying in other members of the Board to ensure transparency.

Action: Governors

Agreed: To receive the EDI Annual Report

BG.22.103 Our People: Annual Report

Received: Document BG/088/22

Reported: The DVC introduced the report, noting the inclusion of an addendum which contained information provided by the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA). Turning to the detail of the report, the DVC highlighted good engagement with the performance development review scheme, and the revised approach to academic progression which has created an achievement-based route through academic grades.

Discussed: In discussion and in response to questions, the following information was noted:

- The University performs well in managing short-term sickness, but the data shows a disproportionate amount of long-term sickness for older female staff. This issue will be further explored by the Institutional Health, Safety and Environment Committee to ascertain and, if necessary, address the underlying causes. Governors welcomed this focus on female health issues and asked that the Committee also gives due regard to understanding the impact of a wider range of protected characteristics on sickness and end of year performance.

Action: DVC

- Mental health issues are captured within the University's sickness and disability data. However, the DVC noted that these issues can only be recorded where they are reported. Whilst the University is fully supportive of staff with mental health problems there can be some reluctance by individuals to declare these issues.
- Bonuses for management staff are allocated through a transparent process articulated in the Framework for Staff Remuneration and Conditions of Service. All bonus allocations are subject to an equality impact assessment undertaken by Human Resources. The University's gender pay gap data is skewed from a financial perspective by the inclusion of the Vice-Chancellor and DVC in the data. However, the University has more female managers than male meaning that a higher number of bonuses are made to female staff.
- Most flexible working requests have been approved due to the clear business cases established. The number of flexible working requests received by the University is not dissimilar to that seen before the pandemic.

Agreed: **To receive the Our People: Annual Report.**

BG.20.104 Board Development and Effectiveness Review: Progress and Further Action

Received: *Document BG/089/22*

Reported: The Chair introduced the report, thanking members for their contributions to the Board's ongoing development work. He noted that the proposed action plan for future work covered actions previously agreed or already in progress.

Discussed: Governors confirmed that they were comfortable with the progress made on the existing development action plan and agreed to approve the action plan for May to September.

Agreed: To approve the **Board Development and Effectiveness Review: Progress and Further Action**

SECTION B ITEMS

BG.22.105 Update from Committee Chairs: Governance & Nominations Committee (20 May 2023)

Reported: The Chair of the Governance & Nominations Committee reported on that afternoon's meeting, noting the following highlights:

- Following the completion of the Board's skills survey, the Committee had undertaken a gap analysis of the Skills Matrix. They identified a number of priorities for the Independent Governor recruitment activity scheduled to take place over the summer. The Chair agreed to send all governors a briefing on this activity by email.

Action: Chair

- The Committee refined and agreed a model Skills Matrix to help determine a mature approach to its future use. This model is designed to allow sufficient flexibility to meet the Board's contemporary needs, while ensuring ongoing coverage of its essential functions.
- In response to governors' feedback, the Committee has been reviewing the Lead Governor Scheme to ensure that it remains appropriate to the Board's needs. A proposal for the Scheme's evolution will be brought to the June meeting of the Board of Governors, specifically focusing on structures and reporting arrangements. A short online briefing session for all governors on the proposals will be convened before this report is presented.

Action: Chair

- New governors had appreciated the rigour and usefulness of the Board's Induction Process. However, members reported that direct interaction with the Students' Union as part of this process would have been welcomed. The Committee agreed that this should be integrated within the schedule of induction meetings for future Independent Governors.

Discussed: In discussion the following information was noted:

- The Board is committed to increasing its diversity and this will be a key focus of the recruitment activity for Independent Governors.

Due consideration has been given by the Committee to how best to attract highly-skilled candidates from underrepresented groups.

Agreed: To note the update from the Chair of Governance & Nominations Committee.

BG.22.106 Board Development and Effectiveness Policy Updates:

- **Board Culture Framework**
- **Board Diversity and Inclusion Statement**

Received: Document BG/090/22

Reported: The Chair thanked governors for their contributions to both policies through informal consultation. He invited members to view a prototype of the Board Culture Framework developed following governors' discussions outside of meetings.

Discussed: In discussion the following information was noted:

- Reflecting on the previous item, governors remarked that the Diversity and Inclusion Statement could be a key recruitment tool in attracting those from underrepresented groups. Members expressed disappointment that the Board does not reflect the full diversity of the University's community, though acknowledged that the Statement does go some way to articulate the non-visible diversity of Board members.
- The Governance, Projects and Policy Manager provided assurance that proactive advertising for this recruitment round was being developed to ensure that a broad range of candidates were made aware of the vacancies. Both governors and staff members would be asked to share the advertisement with their own networks, including alumni networks. In response to a member's question, it was also agreed that advice would be sought from a marketing expert for further iterations of the Statement to ensure its optimum use as a recruitment tool.

Action: Secretariat

- The representation on the Board of governors who were the first in their family to attend university will be added to the Statement before publication.

Agreed: **i. To approve the Board Culture Framework**
 ii. To approve the Board Diversity and Inclusion Statement subject
 to the minor amendment agreed

BG.22.107 Board Visit to Faculty of Health, Social Care and Medicine – 21
April 2023: Observations

Received: *Document BG/091/22*

Reported: Antony Lockley introduced the report which described a recent visit by three governors to the Faculty of Health Social Care and Medicine. He reported that it had been a positive and constructive morning during which governors had encountered a broad range of perspectives from students and staff members. The governors had been assured that the senior team was committed to a shared vision of excellence, and that students were benefiting from outstanding facilities. However, he noted that progress would take time and warned governors that significant improvements to the NSS results could not be expected immediately.

Discussed: Governors confirmed that the paper provided sufficient detail and no further discussion was required.

Agreed: To receive the Board Visit to Faculty of Health, Social Care and Medicine - 21 April 2023: Observations

BG.22.108 Capital Developments Update

Received: *Document BG/092/22*

Reported: The DVC introduced the report noting that good progress had been made with the preparatory work for the Life Sciences Building and design for the new SU facilities. He noted that the recent local council elections had returned the council to an overall majority and predicted that this political stability may be helpful to the University's development ambitions.

Discussed: In response to questions, the following information was noted:

- It is likely that West Lancashire Borough Council will recommence work on its Local Plan in the near future. The University hopes to be part of early conversations to ensure that it is positioned as a key facet of Ormskirk's ongoing development.

- The planning application for Phase 2 has been delayed by a queried surface water drainage issue. The University has responded robustly to the issues raised and has demonstrated that there is sufficient capacity to cope with surface water drainage.

Agreed: To receive the Capital Developments Update

BG.22.109 Finance: Management Information

Received: Document BG/093/22

Reported: The DVC explained that the University was in a strong financial position despite significant cost increases and external pressures. He predicted that the University would end the financial year at or around the budget agreed. The DVC reported that he was working with a consultancy to rate the University's covenant against six characteristics and expected this to show a strong position. This work will be brought to the Board at an appropriate point.

Discussed: Governors confirmed that they had received sufficient information and had no further questions. They thanked the DVC and his team for their work to continue an excellent financial position.

Agreed: To receive the Finance: Management Information

BG.22.110 Academic Board: Summary Report (March 2023)

Received: Document BG/094/22

Reported: The Vice-Chancellor noted that the report remained accurate and there was no further information to provide.

Discussed: Governors confirmed that they had received sufficient information and had no further questions.

Agreed: To receive the Academic Board: Summary Report (March 2023)

BG.22.111 Any other business

There was no other business.

SECTION C ITEMS

The following items were received for information:

BG.22.112 Governance & Nominations Committee Summary Report (March 2023) (*Document BG/095/22*)

BG.22.113 Students' Union Election Report (*Document BG/096/22*)

BG.20.114 Date and time of next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for 19 June 2023.

Members noted that the Board's effectiveness reviewer will attend the meeting as part of the ongoing review.