

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 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	
Jo Nettleton	Independent member	
Louise Robinson	Independent member	Vice Chair of the Board
Mike Rush	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	
Rhona Morris	Governance, Projects & Policy Manager	Secretariat

Apologies

Andy Jackson	Support staff member
Maxine Melling	Independent member
Helen Smallbone	Clerk to the Board

BG.22.073 Declarations of Interest

Item 16/BG/22E Treasury Management Update

The Chair, the Vice-Chancellor and Julian Bucknall declared personal or family interests in Barclays. These declarations are detailed on the Board's [Register of Interests](#).

BG.22.074 Chair's Announcements

.01 Board Secretariat

Due to serious family illness, the Clerk to the Board was unable to attend the meeting. All governors sent their warmest wishes to Helen and her family.

In the Clerk's absence, the Board will receive support from the University Secretary and the Governance, Projects & Policy Manager.

.02 Jane Moore

The Academic Board Nominee, Dr Jane Moore, has resigned from the Board for personal reasons. The Vice-Chancellor, as Chair of the Academic Board, has initiated proceedings to find her replacement.

Governors noted Jane's helpful contributions during her two years on the Board and offered her their best wishes for the future. An appropriate letter of thanks has been sent to her.

.03 Julian Bucknall

Following a significant promotion at Barclays, Julian Bucknall has decided to step down from the Board in July 2023, after 6 years' service.

Members offered their sincere congratulations to Julian on his new role.

.04 Research Showcase

In line with the Board's agreed schedule, governors will receive a presentation on the University's research activity at its next meeting. The Chair and Vice-Chancellor have agreed that this will take the form of an interactive showcase focusing on current and future research

projects and plans to further develop the University's research capability and income.

To accommodate this interesting activity, governors agreed that the start time for May's meeting should be moved to 5:00pm.

Action: Secretariat

.05 Key successes

- The University has been shortlisted for two WhatUni Student Choice Awards: Facilities, and Halls and Student Accommodation. As these awards are based entirely on student votes and feedback, they are a good indicator of students' satisfaction with Edge Hill's facilities.
- The newly-elected MP for West Lancashire, Ashley Dalton, positively referenced the 'thriving' University in her maiden speech in the House of Commons, acknowledging Edge Hill's position as a driver for future innovation and community.

Governors welcomed this excellent feedback from the new MP, following her recent visit to the campus. The Vice-Chancellor was asked to extend to her an invitation to meet with members of the governing body at an appropriate time.

Action: Vice-Chancellor

BG.22.075 Chair's Action

.01 Collective Pay Negotiations

In line with an instruction from the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA), the Chairs of the Board and the Remuneration Committee had agreed that the in-year increase of the higher of 2% or £1000 per annum should apply to all staff not just those on the nationally negotiated pay spine. This forms an accelerated part of the 2023/24 pay deal and will be backdated to 1 February 2023. Colleagues expressed hopes that this gesture will help staff during the ongoing cost of living crisis.

BG.22.076 Minutes of the previous meeting

Received: Document BG/070/22

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

BG.22.077 Action Log

Received: Document BG/071/22

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

The Action Log was received.

BG.22.078 Matters arising not included elsewhere on the agenda

There were no matters arising.

SECTION A ITEMS

BG.22.079 Vice-Chancellor's Report

Received: Document BG/072/22

Reported: The Vice-Chancellor introduced his report by updating governors on the University's operating context, particularly focusing on the ongoing industrial action, internationalisation and the potential trifurcation of the higher education sector.

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

- *Industrial action*
The University and College Union (UCU) continued to take national industrial action. **[Exempt from publication – confidential]**

The unions and UCEA have entered a new stage of negotiation to resolve the dispute, including the establishment of a number of joint working groups to consider areas of particular concern. Whilst this

is a positive step for all parties, UCU had decided to continue strike action against the recommendation of the majority of its membership.

- *Horizon Europe scheme*

The Vice-Chancellor is maintaining a close eye on the progress of the Windsor Protocol and any connected opportunities for the UK to rejoin the Horizon Europe scheme as an associate member. Whilst initial optimism suggested that this could take place quickly, the Vice-Chancellor had picked up on some political unwillingness to pursue this agenda. Further reports will be made in due course.

- *Immigration and internationalisation*

There is substantial political debate about the desirability of UK universities attracting large numbers of students from countries such as India or Nigeria, who are statistically more likely to apply to bring a higher number of dependants. This debate is grounded predominantly on ideology about the attractiveness of immigration, and the Government is considering a range of options, including blocking dependency visas for student entrants.

[Exempt from publication – commercial interests]

- *Initial teacher training*

Applicant demand for teacher training nationally is still very low, illustrating the current undesirability of the profession. The Government continues to aggressively impose its reforms of initial teacher training (ITT), including the restrictive accreditation process, which brings with it stringent curricula requirements. In addition, the Government is considering applying for degree awarding powers for the National Institute of Teaching, bringing the State closer to direct delivery in ITT.

- *Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE)*

The University's programmes are structured through modules which are each allocated a credit value. As such, they could be easily studied on a module-by-module basis although the LLE will require students to be registered for a qualification. In practice the Government's new LLE proposals, may be especially attractive to students wishing to study at post-graduate level or online but at present, both modes of delivery are excluded from the LLE proposals. The sector has some significant concerns about

implementation and it is not expected that LLE in higher education will expand quickly.

- *Support for Ukraine*

The University is closely engaged with the Universities UK international group which is coordinating the UK's support for Ukrainian higher education. Through this, Edge Hill is now twinned with Yaroslav Mudryi National University of Law in Kharkiv. In addition, a small number of individual staff and students from Ukraine, who already had links with Edge Hill or Ormskirk, have joined the University's community and they are being provided with support as appropriate.

Governors noted the need to avoid creating or exacerbating a 'brain drain' from Ukraine, which will need to re-establish essential infrastructure, such as higher education, as soon as possible after the war.

- *Local Government Pension Scheme*

The Chair offered his thanks to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) for his action to prevent the increase of employer contributions to the Local Government Pension Scheme, saving the University £465k per annum.

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

BG.22.080 Student Report

Received: Document BG/073/22

Reported: The Students' Union (SU) nominee reported on the results of the SU's recent elections, noting that the four newly-elected Presidents would assume their roles in July. He welcomed a large increase in applications to take on the part-time International Students' Officer role this year.

Lauren King has been re-elected as Student Governor for a second term. The Chair led members in offering congratulations.

Discussed: In discussion, the following information was noted:

- *Student Support*

The University has seen a notable increase in students seeking financial support. To date, this rise is being accommodated within the additional budget allocated at the start of the year, but the situation is being closely monitored by the Executive team. Management acknowledged that, despite best efforts, some students requiring this support may be unaware of the funds, or reluctant to access help, and consideration is being given to mitigating this risk. Colleagues noted the wealth of anecdotal and peer-reviewed evidence demonstrating that feelings of shame, lack of trust, and dignity can play a crucial role in preventing students coming forward for the vital support to which they are entitled.

Noting the difficulties of communications reaching all students, the Student Governor observed that the Careers Service has recently launched an excellent portal drawing together information about its services. The PVC (Student Experience) & University Secretary agreed to explore whether a similar approach could be usefully adopted by other support services.

Action: PVC (Student Experience) & University Secretary

The Vice-Chancellor reported that, on a recent visit, the Office for Students' Director of Fair Access, John Blake, had been very impressed by the University's support package, indicating that other providers do not offer such a wealth of support. Following this visit, Edge Hill has agreed to take part in the first wave of a new approach to the Access and Participation Plan. Colleagues agreed that it is important for the University to highlight its excellence in student support in all internal and external marketing.

- *Franchise activity*

Noting the success of the Subway franchise, the SU is starting to explore further franchise opportunities for their new facilities. This will complement the University's wholesale review of catering provision across the campus to ensure that the dietary needs of all Edge Hill students are accommodated. This new catering provision will launch in September 2023.

- *Students' Union societies*

Governors noted the positive changes in the SU's approach to its societies in recent years, which makes a significant impact on the

student experience. They congratulated the Chief Executive and his team on this excellent work.

Agreed: To receive the Student Report.

BG.22.081 Board Assurance Framework Reporting

Received: Document BG/074/22

Reported: The DVC introduced the Board Assurance Framework (BAF), noting that the report had been amended since its presentation at Audit Committee, in response to helpful feedback from Committee members. Managers will continue to work with the Committee to ensure that the presentation of the BAF report meets governors' requirements.

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

- *Audit Committee feedback*
The Chair of Audit Committee welcomed the changes made to the report's presentation, particularly the enhanced narrative sections which will ensure greater transparency about risk. He noted that the Lead Governor: BAF Reporting will liaise with managers to ensure further enhancements are adopted, as necessary.

The Chair of Audit Committee reminded members that the Committee will be discussing potential deep dive activity for 2023/24 at its next meeting. This discussion will be informed by the data provided in the BAF.

- *Staffing*
The University continues to operate in a turbulent employment market, particularly affecting professional service areas where the University competes with the private sector for high-quality candidates. Managers are actively exploring more effective options to market the University as an attractive employer.

Recruitment of high-quality academic and front-line service staff continues to operate well, meaning that there is no immediate risk to essential services or the student academic experience.

- *Student Retention*
Governors welcomed the University's high student retention rates but noted anecdotal evidence in the Student Report suggesting that

a material minority of students were considering leaving their course. The SU nominee reported that this was particularly common among students who had some placement activity as part of their course, due to the increased costs this incurred. The DVC informed members that the University has recently amended its Expenses Policy to help to ease this financial burden and hopes it will alleviate students' concerns.

- *Student Recruitment*

The University rejects a proportion of applicants to professional programmes either due to the allocation of student numbers by the Government, or the limited availability of placement opportunities. For all programmes, the University will reject candidates where there does not appear to be a realistic chance that they will meet the published entry criteria.

- *Finance*

The Lead Governor: Finance noted that the University continues to perform exceptionally despite continued turbulence in the operating environment. He suggested that it would be helpful for the Board to continue to discuss risk appetite around growth, particularly in relation to approaching internationalisation with an ethical mindset. The DVC provided assurance on the University's robust budgeting process, and inbuilt resilience in financial forecasts.

Agreed: To receive the Board Assurance Framework report

BG.22.082 Environmental Sustainability Annual Report

Received: Document BG/075/22

Reported: The DVC confirmed that the report remained accurate and there was no additional information to provide. He thanked the Lead Governor: Sustainability for the helpful and constructive feedback she has shared to further enhance the University's sustainability ambitions.

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

- The Lead Governor: Sustainability thanked the DVC and his team for the significant step change represented by this report and the Environmental Sustainability Strategy Delivery Plan. She welcomed

the visible links to the ISO 14001:2015 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and the future focus across all elements. She also commented positively on the intention to undertake peer review and benchmarking activity in advance of the Strategy's next review.

- The University considers environmental sustainability as part of all construction work to ensure that green technology is adopted wherever possible. The Life Sciences Building development will incorporate solar photovoltaic panels at the top of the building. Using space in this way helps to ensure that the Ormskirk estate is fully utilised, without infringing on any green belt protections.
- The strategic target for training (carbon literacy training for 100 staff and students each year) has been based on the current training provision. However, the DVC agreed to review this target to ensure it is appropriate to support the University's ambitions.

Action: DVC

- Student accommodation is designed to be energy efficient, allowing the University to absorb utility bills within its rental charge, whilst keeping this cost 15% below the market rate. To further support students during the cost-of-living crisis, rents in 2023/24 would rise no higher than 3.5% compared to 2022/23. This will reflect the rise to the student loan rather than the full cost of inflation (10.8%).
- The University has implemented a sector-leading process allowing individual applicants to select their own room on campus. This not only creates a sense of belonging and excitement at an early stage, but also empowers applicants to make decisions based on their specific needs, including budgetary concerns.
- In March, the University's energy contract will end. The DVC anticipates that costs will rise by up to 300%.
- It is important that the University's sustainability successes are well communicated to both internal and external stakeholders. To this end, the Executive team is currently undertaking a review of its internal marketing capability to ensure it operates effectively and strengthens staff and students' connections to the University. The Vice-Chancellor will keep the Board updated on the progress of this work.

Action: Vice-Chancellor

- The SustainNET conference in May 2023 will bring many regional stakeholders to campus and will be an opportunity for the University to share its work and shape regional and, where possible, national policy.

Agreed: i. **To approve the Environmental Sustainability Delivery Plan.**
ii. That future Environmental Sustainability Annual Reports should contain detailed updates on progress against the Plan's targets.

Action: DVC

BG.20.083 Health, Safety and Environmental Committee Annual Report

Received: Document BG/076/22

Reported: The DVC confirmed that the report remained accurate and there was no further information to provide.

Discussed: In discussion, the following information was noted:

- The internal health and safety audit process is designed to be appropriate, proportionate and transparent. High-risk areas, for example, biology laboratories, are visited by an external health and safety specialist and issued with actions as required. All other areas engage in a peer-to-peer audit process. Actions are monitored by the Health, Safety and Environment Committee.
- Future Annual Reports would be enhanced with the inclusion of:
 - Contextual information on campus interaction levels (to allow meaningful comparison with years affected by Covid)
 - Disaggregation of staff/student/sports member/visitor classifications
 - Assurance of learning from near misses

The DVC thanked governors for their helpful feedback and agreed to ensure that these elements are included within future reports.

Action: DVC

Agreed: To receive the Health, Safety and Environmental Committee Annual Report

SECTION B ITEMS

BG.22.084 Update from Committee Chairs: Governance & Nominations Committee (20 March 2023)

Reported: **[Exempt from publication – confidential]**

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

BG.22.085 Lead Governor Initiatives: Update on the University's Internship Programme with St. Helens RFC

Received: Document BG/077/22

Reported: **[Exempt from publication – confidential]**

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

- There was no conflict of interest to note as neither Mike Rush personally, nor the Club as an organisation, were benefitting financially from the partnership. Mike noted that the partnership opportunity had arisen following the end of the Club's relationship with the University of Chester. He had provided Edge Hill's contact details to the Club's marketing department but had otherwise remained separate from the initiative.
- The partnership has provided opportunities to students from many different departments, including marketing, creative writing and sports therapy. The University has also benefitted greatly from brand association with a club which recently gained World Champion status. It is hoped that this placement model will provide a template for future partnerships with similar-sized organisations. This will ensure that students benefit from real work placement experiences which support the development of graduate attributes.

- The Club has been greatly impressed by the work produced through the internship scheme, including high-quality television content which had been watched by hundreds of thousands of fans. The Lead Governor: Student Experience agreed to circulate a URL to this video to all governors through the Secretariat.

Action: Secretariat

- The University has a mature infrastructure to support student work placement activity, coordinated by the Productivity and Innovation Centre (PIC). Similar arrangements are already in place with Wigan Council and Everton in the Community. The Vice-Chancellor noted that the PIC had recently received excellent feedback in an independently conducted evaluation report, which he offered to provide to governors.

Action: Vice-Chancellor

- Governors strongly encouraged management to ensure that the excellence of the University's student internship partnerships and the work of the PIC are widely communicated to internal and external stakeholders.

Agreed: To receive the Lead Governor Initiatives: Update on the University's Internship Programme with St. Helens RFC

BG.22.086 Ethical Investment Policy

Received: Document BG/078/22

Reported: The DVC confirmed that there was no additional information to add to the circulated report.

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

- The University's investments were all in bank deposits helping to mitigate the risk of unethical practice.
- Governors encouraged the University to consider green finance investments to further underline its commitment to the Environmental Sustainability Strategy.

Action: DVC

Agreed: To approve the **Ethical Investment Policy 2023-2026**

BG.22.087 Treasury Management Update

Received: Document BG/079/22

Reported: The DVC explained that the Treasury Management Update reflected the changing financial environment, and that the University had benefitted from the rising interest rates. The DVC anticipated strong returns due to the University's continued strong cash position.

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

- The University was not exposed to the emerging banking crisis as it has split its deposits between multiple providers. The only large deposits are at Barclays due to the advantages provided by its sweep account. Governors were satisfied that this sufficiently ameliorated any risk to the University of bank failure.

Agreed: To receive the Treasury Management Update

BG.22.088 Any other business

There was no other business.

SECTION C ITEMS

The following items were received for information:

BG.22.089 Access and Participation Plan Update (*Document BG/080/22*)

BG.22.090 Audit Committee: Summary Report (February 2023) (*Document BG/081/22*)

BG.22.091 Board Effectiveness Action Plan Status Update (*Document BG/082/22*)

BG.20.092 Date and time of next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for 15 May 2023.