

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Minutes of the meeting held on 18 March 2024

Present

Clive Elliott	Independent member	Chair of the Board
Helen Smallbone		Clerk to the Board
Claire Blennerhassett	Teaching staff member	
John Cater	Ex-officio	Vice-Chancellor
Graeme Collinge	Independent member	
Christine Donnelly	Independent member	
Ann Kennedy	Support staff member	
Maggie Lam	Student member	
Antony Lockley	Independent member	
Jo Nettleton	Independent member	
Louise Robinson	Independent member	Vice-Chair of the Board
Mike Tate	Independent member	Chair, Audit Committee
Mark Wilkinson	Independent member	

In Attendance

Lynda Brady	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) and University Secretary	
Steve Igoe	Deputy Vice-Chancellor	
Paul Malone	Chief Executive, Edge Hill Students' Union	
Antonnette Mapesa	EHSU President (Arts & Sciences)	<i>For item BG.23.098</i>
Daniel Morana	EHSU Head of Membership Services	<i>For item BG.23.098</i>
Rhona Morris	Governance, Projects & Policy Manager	
Liam Owens	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Marketing, Student Recruitment and Student Administration)	

Apologies

Leon Culbertson	Academic Board nominee
Lauren King	Student member
Maxine Melling	Independent member

BG.23.098 Presentation: Edge Hill Students' Union

Governors welcomed Antonnette Mapesa, EHSU President for Arts & Sciences, to present on the Students' Union's (SU) services and priorities. The presentation is held on the Convene Document Library and covered:

- The role of the SU Presidents to act as a conduit between students and the services provided by both the Union and University. It was recognised that all parties aim to ensure that students have the resources they need to thrive academically, socially and personally during their time at the University.
- The new Strategic Plan 2024-2027, which outlines the SU's ambitious goals and vision for the next three years, supported by six core values and strategic priorities.
- The ten top priorities for students identified in the SU Strategic Plan, but particularly:
 - *Cost of Living*. This continues to be a major concern for students and has a real impact on both their lives and studies. The SU have developed the Placement Cost Campaign to review the support available to students and are looking forward to meeting with the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) & University Secretary to discuss the challenges reported by students.
 - *Sexual Misconduct*. Students continue to engage with the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Misconduct Awareness (DASMA) campaign to develop a community of active advocates against sexual misconduct. The SU aims to inculcate a compassionate environment where a victim of sexual misconduct can access non-judgemental information and support.
 - *Housing*. The newly launched StudentPad platform has received good early feedback from students. It provides objective information on Ormskirk's private housing provision, giving students confidence that their landlord meets legal requirements.
 - *General Election*. While the date for the 2024 General Election remains unknown, the SU will work to empower students to be active citizens and use their votes in both local and national elections. The SU will endorse the NUS 'Turn Up' campaign.

In discussion, the following information was noted:

- Students will benefit hugely from the new capital projects, and the SU look forward to having a more visible presence in the centre of campus. The interim arrangements have created some logistical challenges, but this minor disruption is justified by the much-improved facilities in development.
- Governors noted the benefits of hearing from the SU sabbatical team on their plans for the near future. It was agreed that an invitation should be issued by the Board each year to the sabbatical team.

Action: Clerk

The Board thanked Antonnette for her professional delivery of the SU presentation, and Daniel Morana, Head of Membership Services, for providing technical assistance. The Chair and Clerk offered to deliver a reciprocal presentation on the Board of Governors to the SU team to help the sabbatical officers and wider SU staff body to understand the Board's remit and responsibilities.

Action: Chair/Clerk/EHSU

BG.23.099 Declarations of Interest

[Exempt from publication: Confidential]

BG.23.100 Chair's Announcements

.01 Board membership

Claire Blennerhassett, Teaching Staff Representative, was welcomed to her first meeting. All attendees introduced themselves.

.02 [Exempt from publication: Confidential]

.03. OfS Prevent return

The University's OfS Prevent Return was endorsed by the OfS following submission in December. The Executive were congratulated for a high-quality report enabling a positive response, which many providers had yet to receive.

.04 Faculty of Education Ofsted

Congratulations were noted for the Faculty of Education and the many professional services staff involved in the recent Ofsted inspection of initial teacher training (ITT) programmes, resulting in 'Outstanding' ratings for all areas. This is the only such outcome for English universities in the current inspection framework. The Chair has written to the Pro Vice-Chancellor & Dean of Education to convey the Board's delight in the result.

.05 Awards Shortlistings

The University has been nominated in three categories in the Educate North awards: Community Engagement, Student Experience, Mental Health and Wellbeing. The awards ceremony takes place in Manchester on 18 April and it was hopeful a Governor would attend in support (later confirmed as Mark Wilkinson).

The University has been shortlisted for a further three awards at the *Student Nursing Times* awards: Inspirational Student Nurse of the Year, University Educator of the Year, Partnership of the Year. Louise Robinson will represent the Board at the ceremony in London next month.

Governors welcomed this external recognition of the University's excellence and congratulated staff teams on their nominations.

.06 Deputy Vice-Chancellor

After 28 years of dedicated service, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC), Steve Igoe, will retire from the University in April. The Chair outlined many of the initiatives led by Steve to transform the University into the successful organisation it is today, and to safeguard its future. Members noted sincere appreciation for Steve's acumen and sound advice to governors over many years.

In response, Steve reflected on his many talented colleagues over the years, highlighting in particular the strength of his working relationship with the Vice-Chancellor. While he noted there are difficult times ahead for the sector, the DVC felt confident that Edge Hill is in a strong position to weather the storm and to emerge with relative strength. He conveyed his warm wishes to the Board and University for the future.

BG.23.101 Chair's Action

There was no Chair's Action to report.

BG.23.102 Minutes of the previous meeting

Received: Document BG/071/23

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 February 2024 were agreed as an accurate record.

BG.23.103 Action Log

Received: Document BG/072/23

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

The Action Log was received.

BG.23.104 Matters arising not included elsewhere on the agenda

.01 [Exempt from publication: Commercial Interests]

SECTION A ITEMS

BG.23.105 Vice-Chancellor's Report

Received: Document BG/073/23

Reported: The Vice-Chancellor introduced the report, updating members on the following themes:

- The interviews for PVC (Resources) will take place on 3 April, followed shortly by interviews for the Director of Strategic Planning.
- **[Exempt from publication: Commercial Interests]**
- Recruitment and retention remained positive, and the University is in a strong place in terms of conversions compared to the same point last year. The Vice-Chancellor noted that the previous weekend's open day had been well attended.

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

- The University was delighted in the attainment of 'Outstanding' Ofsted ratings across its ITT provision and was in the process of

communicating its success widely among stakeholders. Marketing materials have been updated and there are plans to share the news with every school in the country as well as key national stakeholders.

- The decision to tax the SU building has been taken in full consideration of all needs and has involved consultation with the SU. An independent assessment of the rental value will be required, and the University will enter into a legal agreement with the SU to protect all parties. The block grant has not yet been finalised, but the decision on taxing the building will be a component of discussions.
- The advice centre referenced in the Vice-Chancellor's report refers to a new facility which will co-locate SU and University advice and facilities services. This complementary way of working aims to provide students with a one-stop shop for all their support needs.
- The University is keen to make optimal use of resource and, as such, has reviewed its approach to staff recruitment. Managers have been asked to review start and end dates to ensure that recruitment and activity align. This does not indicate a recruitment freeze but a sensible approach to controlling spend. As ever, additional resource will be provided where there is a sound business case.

• *[Exempt from publication: Confidential]*

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

BG.23.106 Students' Union: Report and Strategic Plan 2024-2027

Received: Document BG/074/23

Reported: The SU nominee confirmed that she had nothing to add to the circulated paper.

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

- Governors welcomed the SU's new Strategic Plan, emphasising the high-quality of its presentation. They received assurance that

it is underpinned by a series of operational plans to guide internal activity, which are reviewed on an annual basis.

- The increase in use of the SU's advisory service is likely due to the increased visibility of the facility and the availability of more channels (face-to-face, telephone, virtual appointments) to access support. The Chief Executive anticipates a further surge in demand once the advice centre in the new building opens and will allocate resource accordingly.
- The SU is reviewing ways that it can share anonymised case data from its advice services with the University to allow greater understanding of trends and implementation of targeted group support. Members noted that this would benefit all students in enabling a proactive response to prevent further issues while protecting the individual students using the service.
- The SU's student vacancies are administered in the same manner as any of its staff vacancies. The SU is a discrete organisation, with its own HR function and processes.

Agreed: To receive the Student Report.

BG.23.107 Board Assurance Framework Summary Report

Received: Document BG/075/23

Reported: The DVC confirmed that there was no further information to add to the paper. He reported that it accorded with the Audit Committee summary report which detailed the discussions held with the Committee in February.

The Chair of the Audit Committee was also content with the report as presented and had no further comments.

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

- Following the Audit Committee meeting, the University had filled both vacant posts to support the implementation of the new Student Records System. The shortlisted field for both roles was very strong, indicating the attractiveness of the University as an employer.
- The draft consultant's report on the new Marketing Strategy had been received immediately before the meeting and looked to be

very positive. The Marketing Strategy will be presented to the Board at its next meeting in May.

- The PVC (Marketing, Student Recruitment and Student Administration) corrected a typo in the Executive Summary. The University intends to use the new Student Records System to admit students from September 2025, rather than 2024.

Agreed: To receive the Board Assurance Framework Summary Report

BG.23.108 International Engagement and Academic Partnerships: Annual Report

Received: Document BG/076/23

Reported: The PVC (Marketing, Student Recruitment and Student Administration) introduced the report which remained current.

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

- The University is keen to expand its reach within the region and is proactively identifying opportunities to work with businesses and regional partners. Increasing visibility in core parts of East Lancashire may also drive student recruitment.
- Changes in Government policy, the international market and the University's own position, have dated the existing International Strategy. The PVC has therefore decided to bring its review date forward to allow for a more context-driven approach, which will take into consideration other strategic aims. The revised Strategy will be presented to the Board in early 2025. The PVC agreed to meet with the Lead Governor: ESG to discuss possibilities to incorporate social sustainability in the Strategy.

Action: PVC (Marketing, Student Recruitment and Student Administration)

- The new Strategy will be cognisant of the University's commitment to ethical practice and partnerships. Noting the complexities of operating within constantly shifting geopolitics, the PVC will have regard to managing any risks incurred by internationalisation when developing the new Strategy.

- Increased international activity would not necessarily have a negative impact on the University's environmental commitments. Numbers of international students remain low as a proportion of the student body, and technology is used to minimise travel unless there is a substantial benefit from face-to-face relationship building. Governors reported value in other settings of carbon budget analysis, and noted that it may support discussions around new international activity. Carbon budgeting is not used to stop activity, but to encourage mindfulness about its impact.
- It was noted that the report was light on research progress in an international context. The PVC confirmed that this was one of the reasons for bringing forward the strategy review which will include a full consideration of research opportunities.
- Governors noted recent data produced by the OfS demonstrating the reliance of some providers on international recruitment. While the University's direct risk exposure is low, there is a significant possibility of increased domestic competition if the international market declines. This competitiveness will be further exacerbated by increasing financial pressures across the sector.
- **[Exempt from publication: Commercial Interests]**
- Governors noted and welcomed a suggestion from the PVC to split this report into two discrete items in future years. This will allow governors to gain greater understanding of the University's work in both areas and thus to gain a deeper level of assurance. The Clerk will liaise with the PVC to schedule this appropriately for 2024/25.

Action: Clerk/PVC (Marketing, Student Recruitment and Student Administration)

- Agreed:*
- i) To receive the International Engagement and Academic Partnerships Annual Report
 - ii) That the report should be split into two discrete items in future cycles

BG.23.109 Environmental Sustainability Annual Report

Received: Document BG/077/23

Reported: The DVC introduced the report highlighting in particular the introduction of Sustainability as one of the core Graduate Attributes which underpin the students' employability framework. He also noted the successful outcome of a recent internal audit assignment which provided a

‘Substantial Assurance’ opinion on the University’s progress against the Environmental Sustainability Strategy.

The Lead Governor: ESG welcomed the report, noting a step change in activity since the same point last year. She reported on a positive meeting with managers who have responsibility for implementing the Sustainability Strategy. In terms of next steps, the Lead Governor had encouraged them to enhance visibility of reporting to ensure that both internal and external stakeholders are engaged with enhancing sustainable practice.

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

- Capital investment to attain the targets identified in the Strategy was built into the existing capital developments bids approved by the Board. No further investment is anticipated to meet current commitments. The Vice-Chancellor emphasised the clear gains made in reducing the University’s carbon footprint through the demolition of outdated buildings as part of the Estates Strategy agreed in 2022.
- The Strategy is underpinned by a very detailed action plan to ensure that the work to attain targets is focused. This action plan is overseen by the Sustainability Committee.
- Work is ongoing with numerous stakeholders to ensure the University meets its carbon neutrality target. Baselining activity has already been completed and will inform the remainder of the project.
- Public transport options in Ormskirk remain limited, to the frustration of all. The University funds a bus service to transport students, staff and visitors from the bus station to the Ormskirk campus but has no direct control over other methods of transport. Nevertheless, the Vice-Chancellor has written to Lancashire County Council multiple times to recommend low-cost initiatives to improve local infrastructure but has received limited engagement. Governors commended his endeavours.

[Exempt from publication: Commercial Interests]

Governors stressed the importance of effective stakeholder engagement. They asked that the Marketing Strategy discussion in May includes further insight on this and how governors can support this work.

Action: PVC (Marketing, Student Recruitment and Student Administration)

Agreed: **To approve the Environmental Sustainability: Annual Report**

BG.23.110 Health and Safety Committee Annual Report

Received: *Document BG/078/23*

Reported: The DVC confirmed that the report remained accurate.

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

- Governors sought assurance that deteriorating trends were not indicative of systemic issues. The DVC explained that the Institutional Health and Safety Committee pays close attention to trends in data. The movement in some areas is very small, and in others is indicative of better reporting of issues. However, managers recognise that the report did not sufficiently convey nuance or context which would give governors a more rounded picture. It was agreed that the presentation of future reports should be reviewed to ensure that it more accurately captures nuance.

Action: DVC

Whilst the Committee's diligence in undertaking analysis was welcomed, governors would appreciate an interim report (in approximately six months) demonstrating positive trajectory stemming from the proactive work undertaken. The report should incorporate leading indicators and their outcomes to give assurance of progress.

Action: Clerk/DVC

- The University has increased the resource allocated to Facilities Management, including significant investment in staffing, to ensure that the University continues to meet its compliance requirements.
- It was noted that many staff will not have been required to undertake training sessions in the reporting period as their previous

training remained live. Attendees agreed that future reports should illustrate how many staff have current live training as well as figures for those trained in the reporting period.

Agreed: **To approve the Health and Safety Committee Annual Report**

BG.23.111 *[Exempt from publication: Confidential]*

SECTION B ITEMS

BG.23.112 Update from Committee Chairs

.01 Remuneration Committee (18 March 2024)

Reported: The Clerk reported on that afternoon's meeting, noting the following highlights:

• *[Exempt from publication: Confidential]*

Discussed: Governors confirmed that the report was sufficient, and they had no further questions.

Agreed: To receive the update

.02 Governance & Nominations Committee (18 March 2024)

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

- Governors were thanked for their feedback on the draft Governor Recruitment Strategy following its consideration in February. The suggestions received from members had been integrated into the final document which was approved by the Committee. To support the Strategy's aims, a small budget was agreed to support recruitment activity beginning in April.
- The Committee had undertaken its annual review of the Board's Skills Matrix. This core document informs the Board's recruitment activity, as well as other discussions on the Board's composition, effectiveness or development needs. In light of the analysis received, the Committee had determined that key skills priorities for

Independent Governor recruitment would be: digital expertise, research/knowledge exchange, people, marketing and PR. The Board has made considerable progress in expanding its diversity but will continue to seek to achieve improved minority ethnic and younger people representation.

- In line with the Recruitment Strategy, the Secretariat has been commissioned to undertake a review of evidence for an apprentice/associate governor scheme, and for the use of governor remuneration. These items will be considered by the Committee in June.
- The Vice-Chair of Governors will retire from the Board in November, following three full terms of service to the University. In order to allow a smooth leadership transition, all Independent Governors will be contacted in the near future to seek expressions of interest in the role.
- To ensure clear separation of responsibilities between audit and finance, Mark Wilkinson was invited to take on the Lead Governor: Finance role from Mike Tate. Mark has accepted the invitation and will commence the role from 1 July.
- An evaluation survey from the Board's Strategy and Development Day in January had indicated that governors had received great value from the event. There was generally positive feedback on the day's structure and content, as well as logistical arrangements, and the small number of highlighted improvement areas will be factored into the January 2025 event planning.

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

- The DVC recommended that the Secretariat review a report produced by HEFCE before its disestablishment on the use of governor remuneration. This report indicated some significant concerns around the appropriateness of remuneration in light of Charity Commission regulations. The Chair noted that the CUC had also produced guidance which would be usefully integrated into the Secretariat's work. He reported that 21 providers are now paying governors. Any decisions on remuneration for governors will require full Board approval and potentially be subject to approval from the Office for Students.

Agreed: To receive the update

BG.23.113 Update from Lead Governors

.01 Student Experience

The Lead Governor: Student Experience reported on a positive meeting with the PVC (Student Experience) & University Secretary, The Director of Student Services, the Head of Directorate Office, and the Head of Access and Participation. The Lead Governor was struck by the breadth of areas which take responsibility for ensuring that students have a good experience at Edge Hill.

The University is working on its next Student Experience Strategy, informed by its work to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds and the regulatory environment in which it operates.

On EDI-related matters, the Lead Governor: Student Experience reported that the term 'equity' is now replacing 'equality' in much literature. She intended to discuss this with the strategic leads for EDI before the Board considers the EDI annual report in May.

.02 ESG

The Lead Governor: ESG explained that she had recently met with the Chair of SustainNET and the PVC (Research) to explore research and how it contributes to the local community. She reported on numerous initiatives to encourage groups across the region to work together to contribute to various environmental community projects. Momentum continues to grow, and a conference will be hosted by UCLan in the summer.

The Lead Governor also noted that the Institute for Social Responsibility is now the Centre for Social Responsibility. It continues to engage well with stakeholders and to draw pockets of good practice together.

BG.23.114 Any other business

There was no other business.

SECTION C ITEMS

The following items were received for information:

BG.23.115 **Summary Report: Audit Committee (19 February 2024)** (*Document BG/080/23*)

BG.23.116 **Date and time of next meeting**

The next meeting is scheduled for 20 May 2024. Formal business will commence at 17:15 to accommodate a substantial agenda.