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| **BOARD OF GOVERNORS** |  |

Minutes of the meeting held on 18 September 2023

| **Present** |  |  |
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| Clive Elliott | Independent member | Chair of the Board |
| Helen Smallbone |  | Clerk to the Board |
| John Cater | Ex-officio | Vice-Chancellor |
| Leon Culbertson | Academic Board nominee |  |
| Amanda Fulford | Teaching staff member |  |
| Ann Kennedy | Support staff member |  |
| Lauren King | Student member |  |
| Maggie Lam | Student member |  |
| Antony Lockley | Independent member |  |
| Maxine Melling | 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 |
| Mark Wilkinson | Independent member |  |
| In attendance |  |  |
| Mark Allanson | Pro Vice-Chancellor (External Relations) |  |
| Steve Igoe | Deputy Vice-Chancellor |  |
| Paul Malone | Chief Executive, EHSU |  |
| Liz Mohr | Independent Effectiveness Reviewer |  |
| Liam Owens | Acting Pro Vice-Chancellor: Marketing, Student Recruitment and Student Administration |  |
| **Apologies** |  |  |
| Graeme Collinge | Independent member |  |
| Christine Donnelly | Independent member |  |

**BG.23.002 Declarations of Interest**

The Support Staff Member highlighted that business within her operational role may overlap with item BG.23.012. The Chair thanked her and noted that he would remain cognisant of this declaration during the discussion.

**BG.23.003 Chair’s Announcements**

The Chair extended a welcome to all, noting that this would be Mark Allanson’s final meeting prior to his retirement. On behalf of the Board, the Chair thanked Mark for his significant contribution to the University during his tenure and wished him well for his retirement.

The Chair then referred members to the following items:

1. *League tables and financial performance*

The University has risen 20 places in the Guardian’s ranking and 9 places in the Sunday Times’. This is on the back of a solid improvement in the Complete University Guide. As detailed later on the agenda, the University’s financial outturn for the year ending 31 July 2023 is excellent. The Chair congratulated the University’s management for this stunning performance and thanked all University staff for their role in delivering this success.

1. *Scholarships Evening*

An invitation to the annual scholarships award ceremony was extended to all members. A drinks reception will be held in advance to enable governors to meet the University’s new Chancellor. A formal invitation will be issued shortly, alongside diary requests for other activities such as 1:1 meetings with the Chair.

1. *January Away Day*

The Chair reminded members that the next away day would focus on strategy development. He advised that an eminent professional in the higher education sector had been secured to deliver an update on the higher education landscape. They will also host a Q&A, which will be of significant benefit to members.

1. *Black History Month*

During October the University will host a range of exhibitions and events in recognition of Black History Month. The Chair noted the programme was excellent and encouraged all members to engage with events where possible.

**BG.23.004 Chair’s Action**

None.

**BG.23.005 Minutes of the previous meeting**

##### Received: Document BG/001/23

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2023 were agreed as an accurate record.

**BG.23.006 Action Log**

##### Received: Document BG/002/23

All items were either actioned or in progress. Governors noted that a new Action Log template will be introduced following this meeting.

The Action Log was received.

BG.23.007 Matters arising not included elsewhere on the agenda

None.

**SECTION A ITEMS**

BG.23.008 Vice-Chancellor’s Report

# Received: Document BG/003/23

*Reported:* The Vice-Chancellor confirmed that the report provided an accurate reflection of current strategic issues for the University. He gave an update on student recruitment data and progress on campus refurbishment works.

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

* Overall, there is likely to be a reduction of approximately one percent in the total student population of 2023/24 compared to 2022/23. The University has budgeted conservatively in respect of tuition fee income and the Executive is not unduly concerned about the direct budgetary implications of a marginally smaller population.
* A significant programme of work has been undertaken to communicate with and support students during the summer period. This should lead to improved retention and lower ‘Did Not Return’ numbers in 2023/24.
* The increase in international students reflects applications from a range of areas, notably across Africa and South Asia. As with all student groups, management colleagues will actively oversee international student progress to ensure that student support remains appropriate. Further, an Internationalisation Working Group has been established to ensure that service areas are well prepared for the needs of a more diverse student population.
* While good progress has been made against the University’s Internationalisation Strategy, with a significant increase in student numbers, the University is not dependent on fee income from international students. The Executive acknowledged the potential for fewer international students to have access to the United Kingdom due to Government policy changes but do not see any material risk in this or the increased competition it may lead to.
* The University’s seemingly poor performance in the People and Planet element of the Sunday Times’ Good University Guide reflects the University’s decision not to participate in the relevant data collection process, rather than any underlying issues. The data return upon which the assessment is made is an optional one, which the University (along with many others in the sector) had opted out of due to the associated administrative burden. The University had not envisaged that there would be a negative consequence of opting out of the return and will recommence its participation in future.

*Agreed:* To receive the Vice-Chancellor’s Report.

BG.23.009 Student Report

# Received: Document BG/004/23

*Reported:* The Student Representative (ML) introduced the report noting that it remained an accurate reflection of contemporary issues. She highlighted that work on the Students’ Union’s (SU) temporary student facilities was close to completion and would be ready for the start of term.

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

* *National Student Survey (NSS)*

Although the SU had performed well in the NSS, sitting 3.11% above the benchmark, there was a dip of 11 places nationally since last year’s excellent performance. While the SU was generally pleased with the outcome, governors were assured that the SU had identified areas for improvement to be taken forward. Examples of agreed actions include a drive to increase membership of academic and social societies, and a major investment to increase student employment across the SU and its commercial activity.

* *Student Facilities*

The laundrette facilities have been enhanced and, notwithstanding the temporary nature of their positioning, will be an improvement on the previous offer.

* *Strategic Plan*

The SU’s next Strategic Plan will be considered by the Students’ Union’s Board of Trustees in November. Once the SU’s Board has approved the plan, **a suitable date should be agreed for the University’s Board of Governors to receive and discuss the document.**

**Action: Clerk/ SU CEO**

*Agreed:* To receive the Student Report.

**BG.23.010** **National Student Survey (NSS) Results**

# Received: Document BG/005/23

*Reported:* The Vice-Chancellor introduced the report, highlighting the new methodology used to construct the NSS and the related implications.

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

* The University’s performance in recent years, notably since the Covid-19 pandemic, has been weaker in Nursing, Allied Health Professions and Primary Education. These areas incorporate a substantial amount of time where students are out on practice, and there are limitations to the extent to which the University can directly control the quality of trainees’ experience on placement. Trainees may also be in a strained working environment when the NSS is completed, which may affect their perception of their overall University experience. This might abate as the ramifications of Covid-19 dissipate, though there is no doubt that public sector professions such as nursing and teaching will remain challenging environments.

Accordingly, the Board sought and received assurance from the Executive that:

1. the University was undertaking all reasonable actions to ensure there is effective support for students whilst they are out on placement
2. students are well prepared for the environment they will be entering when on placement and, importantly, understand the University’s role in supporting them during this period
3. there are no issues around the number of staff in place at EHU to deliver learning support and pastoral care for trainees.

* The impact of performance in the areas listed above cannot be underestimated given the size of the related student populations. Members noted that this reinforces the scale of the current challenge, notably in Nursing and Allied Health Professions.
* Governors reflected on the Board’s recent engagement with the Faculty of Health, Social Care and Medicine (FHSCM) senior team, noting a detailed action plan was in place to enhance the student experience. Members observed that, while there has been progress, plans have not yet translated into sufficient improvement in the NSS.
* In response to questions about the adequacy and effectiveness of the FHSCM’s action plans, Executive members noted the substantial work that has been undertaken regarding systems and processes. It was, however, recognised that there is more work to do to ensure that staff and students are engaged in and recognise the benefits of these developments. Accordingly, governors were particularly interested in how staff are supported and challenged to meet strategic objectives.
* Student Voice Surveys will be carried out in the autumn for all departments. Irrespective of performance in 2023, there is an obligation for all departments to strive to deliver an excellent student experience. Associate Deans for each faculty are reporting directly to Directorate on their work to deliver improvements.

In bringing the discussion to a close, the Chair noted that governors sought assurance on a range of issues which might helpfully be tested via an internal audit. The Chair therefore recommended an internal audit be commissioned to confirm the root causes of the disappointing NSS outcome, and test the effectiveness of work to enhance the student experience, in Nursing and Allied Health Professions. The Terms of Reference should include an assessment of the adequacy and effectiveness of the Faculty’s action plans and approach to executing these, including staff and student engagement.

*Agreed:* i)To receive the National Student Survey Results

ii)To **commission an internal audit on the adequacy and effectiveness of work to enhance the student experience in Nursing and Allied Health Professions**. Audit Committee will consider the detailed assignment report, with a summary provided to the Board in November if practically possible. If November is not feasible, then a special meeting of the Board should be held in December so that the matter does not run on into 2024.

**Action: Clerk/ Chair of Audit / Executive**

BG.23.011 Graduate Outcomes Survey Results

# Received: Document BG/006/23

*Reported:* The Pro Vice-Chancellor (External Relations) introduced the report noting that the data demonstrated a positive trajectory across all aspects of the survey.

*Discussed:* In response to questions, the following points were noted:

* While the University is below the national average for respondents in highly skilled employment, the trajectory is positive – with a 4.7% improvement on last year.
* The positive impact of the central ‘Careers Corner’ was noted and celebrated.
* A distributed model had previously operated, whereby staff supporting work-based learning were based centrally and within the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. Following a review, these posts are now co-located in the Careers department to ensure all students benefit from a single central resource.
* The University’s Graduate Attributes have been updated, with Sustainability now included as a distinct attribute.

*Agreed:* To receive the Graduate Outcomes Survey Results

BG.23.012 Review of Student Records System (SRS)

# Received: Document BG/007/23

***Exempt from publication.***

#### SECTION B ITEMS

**BG.23.013** **Board Effectiveness Action Plan**

# Received: Document BG/008/23

*Reported:* The Chair referred to progress against the actions listed and thanked members for engaging in work to enhance the Board’s effectiveness. He noted that the Board is currently operating with multiple action plans and that recommendations from the Independent Effectiveness Review (IER) are imminent. For clarity and ease of reference, the Chair recommended that all extant and IER actions be recorded in the Board’s standard Action Log which will be reviewed at each meeting.

*Agreed:* i) To receive the Board Effectiveness Action Plan.

ii) To record the full scope of the Board’s current actions in the standard Action Log.

**Action: Clerk**

BG.23.014 Academic Board (July 2023): Summary Report

# Received: Document BG/009/23

*Reported:* The Vice-Chancellor introduced the report noting that it served to give members insight to the work of the Academic Board at its last meeting.

*Discussed:* In response to a question, the Vice-Chancellor confirmed that Teaching and Learning enhancement had been discussed at length during the meeting, as is the case for all Academic Board meetings. He noted that this should have been reflected in the summary report and confirmed that the omission was an issue with the report as opposed to the underlying activity.

*Agreed:* To receive the Academic Board (July 2023): Summary Report.

**BG.23.015** **Board of Governors: Schedule of Business for 2023/24**

# Received: Document BG/010/23

*Reported:* The Clerk introduced the report, noting that it had been developed in view of items that the Board must consider, alongside areas the Board had identified as matters of priority or interest.

The Clerk noted that, during the Board’s pre-meeting that evening, governors had expressed a desire to keep the schedule as an agile document which may be updated with the Board’s contemporary views about core areas. The Clerk therefore sought broad approval for the document in its current form, noting that it may be subject to change.

*Discussed:* Reflecting on their first year in office, one governor indicated that they would like to consider more items which bring out student feedback. The Vice-Chancellor detailed the range of ways the student voice is captured in-year, including Student Voice Surveys. Members welcomed the update and agreed it would be helpful to utilise these mechanisms to enable the Board to proactively seek out the student voice in a systematic way. Members noted that any such reports should be simplified and appropriate for Board level.

In discussion around how to gain an authentic understanding of the student experience, it was noted that student case studies would be a helpful way to bring student experience reports to life. Members were also advised about the University’s Student Advisory Panels, which bring together groups of students with different characteristics to provide feedback on their experience of the University’s systems and processes.

*Agreed:* i) To approve the **Board of Governors: Schedule of Business for 2023/24**, subject to the inclusion of additional **reports on the Student Experience.** These reports should be designed to provide the Board with a timely understanding of general student feedback. They may include data, case studies, Student Voice Survey outcomes and/or other relevant information and feedback collected in-year. The Executive will propose the timings and nature of the reports.

**Action: Clerk**

ii) To agree that the **Schedule of Business will be periodically revisited at the Board’s pre-meetings and may change throughout the year.**

**Action: Clerk / Chair**

BG.23.016 Board of Governors Standing Orders

# Received: Document BG/011/23

*Reported:* The Clerk introduced the report noting that the tracked changes were minor in nature and derived from recommendations made by governors in 2022/23.

*Discussed:* The Student Representative (ML) highlighted that earlier that evening the Board had agreed to commence its pre-meeting 30 minutes prior to Board and that this should be clarified in the procedures.

*Agreed:* To **approve the Standing Orders,** subject to clarification in point seven that pre-Board meetings will commence 30 minutes prior to formal business opening.

**Action: Clerk**

**BG.23.017 Capital Developments Progress Report**

# Received: Document BG/012/23

*Reported:* The DVC introduced the report noting challenges associated with planning permission.

*Discussed:* In discussion, the following information was noted:

***Exempt from publication.***

*Agreed:* To note the Capital Developments Progress Report.

**BG.23.018 Any other business**

None reported.

#### SECTION C ITEMS

The following items were received for information:

**BG.23.019 Anticipated Financial Outturn for the Year to 31 July 2023** (*Document BG/014/23*)

**BG.23.020 Use of the University Seal** (*Document BG/015/23*)

Note: The University Seal has not been used since the last update to governors (November 2022).

**BG.23.021 OfS Data Information Requirements 2023/24** (*Document BG/016/23*)

**BG.23.022 Minutes of the Teaching Staff Consultative and Negotiation Committee dated: 21 June 2023** (*Document BG/017/23*)

**BG.23.023 Minutes of the Health, Safety and Environment Committee dated: 27 July 2023** (*Document BG/018/23*)

BG.23.024 Date and time of next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for 17:30 on 16 October 2023. A pre-meeting for governors will commence at 17:00.