

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Minutes of the meeting held on 19 February 2024

Present

Clive Elliott	Independent member	Chair of the Board
Helen Smallbone		Clerk to the Board
John Cater	Ex-officio	Vice-Chancellor
Graeme Collinge	Independent member	
Leon Culbertson	Academic Board nominee	
Christine Donnelly	Independent member	
Ann Kennedy	Support staff member	
Lauren King	Student 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	
Paul Malone	Chief Executive, Edge Hill Students' Union	
Rhona Morris	Governance, Projects & Policy Manager	
Liam Owens	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Marketing, Student Recruitment and Student Administration)	
Fay Sherrington	Director of Student Services	<i>For agenda items BG.23.071 and BG.23.088</i>
George Talbot	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research) and Dean of Arts & Sciences	<i>For agenda item BG.23.081</i>

Apologies

Amanda Fulford	Teaching staff member
Steve Igoe	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC)
Maxine Melling	Independent member

BG.23.071 Presentation: Student Services Provision

Governors had expressed an interest in understanding more about the student experience and support services provided by the University. In response to this request, Lynda Brady, PVC (Student Experience) & University Secretary, and Fay Sherrington, Director of Student Services, delivered a presentation on Student Services provision. The presentation is held on the Convene document library, and covered:

- The department's strategic purpose and centrality to students' overall experience of university, particularly when they are at their most vulnerable
- Proactive ventures to help students build resilience before a problem occurs, and to enable staff across the University to provide appropriate support
- The increasing requirements for risk management, both for individual students and in meeting external compliance requirements
- The impact of interventions in supporting student satisfaction and retention

A detailed question and answer session followed in which governors tested and received assurance about:

- The increasingly complex support needs of incoming students, particularly around mental health issues and neurodiversity, which are issues presenting across the whole sector. While the underlying reasons cannot be guaranteed, it is likely that the pandemic, cost of living crisis, and increased awareness of neurodiversity and mental health challenges are all contributing factors. The University has a strong reputation for supporting students with complex needs and has developed toolkits for all staff to help them to deal appropriately with specific scenarios. Staff representatives confirmed that these toolkits were widely used and effective.
- Particular consideration is being given to supporting students to integrate with University life beyond their academic studies. The Student Life Team organises social events and provides individual

support to students with social anxiety to attend these. On-campus accommodation is also designed to facilitate social interaction in high-quality communal spaces.

- The varied nature of student services provision across the sector means that it is difficult to benchmark the service against other providers. However, the Student Services team is well-networked externally to ensure that they remain alert to emerging best practice and can quickly respond with revised interventions. The Director of Student Services is very well respected in her field and is a former Chair of AMOSSHE, the national Student Services Organisation.
- The team has a positive attitude to constructive feedback and always seeks to enhance existing processes. However, feedback is generally very positive, with numerous students asserting that the support received from the department was a major factor in their academic and personal successes during their time at Edge Hill.

Members expressed their thanks to the presenters, noting the discussion had provided the Board with confidence in the University's Student Services provision. Governors were particularly grateful for the inclusion of student case studies illustrating the support provided by the Student Services team.

BG.23.072 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

BG.23.073 Chair's Announcements

.01 Paper Quality

The Chair passed on members' thanks for the outstanding quality of the papers for this meeting, which had provided a comprehensive and holistic insight into the University's activities.

.02 Board Membership

Following an election, Dr Claire Blennerhassett (Faculty of Health, Social Care and Medicine), has been nominated to the Board by teaching staff, subject to the Board's approval. It was confirmed that the election was held in line with the agreed process and that the relevant checks were undertaken regarding Fit and Proper Person requirements. Members confirmed the appointment and looked forward

to welcoming Claire to her first meeting in March. The Clerk offered to circulate Claire's profile to governors via email in advance of the meeting.

Action: Clerk

Governors noted with regret that the recent election marked the end of Amanda Fulford's term on the Board. Members noted the significant contributions she had made during three years on the governing body and offered their sincere thanks. The Chair informed members that he had written to formally express his gratitude to Amanda, and would invite her to attend the Board's next dinner so governors could offer their individual thanks.

Action: Chair/Clerk

.03 Stakeholder Engagement

The Chair reported on a successful visit to the University by the Walton Centre, a key healthcare partner which provides significant numbers of placement opportunities to Edge Hill students. He offered his thanks to the Vice-Chancellor and the PVC and Dean of Health, Social Care & Medicine for facilitating the visit.

.04 University Successes

The Chair commended the University for:

- Achieving a significant £2.5m grant award for the Arts4Us project, which will provide young people and their families with access to arts and arts therapies
- Being shortlisted in five categories in the *Student Nursing Times* awards
- Receiving certification from the ScaleUp Institute, allowing the Productivity and Innovation Centre to increase the support it provides to small and medium sized enterprises in the region

.05 Chief Operating Officer

[Exempt from publication – confidential]

BG.23.074 Chair's Action

.01 Safeguarding Policy

The Chair had approved interim minor updates to the Safeguarding Policy in line with recommendations stemming from the Ofsted inspection of apprenticeships provision in December 2023.

Governors noted that a fully reviewed Policy was included on the agenda for Board's consideration (item BG.23.088) in line with the standard schedule.

BG.23.075 Minutes of the previous meeting

Received: Document BG/053/23

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

BG.23.076 Action Log

Received: Document BG/054/23

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

The Action Log was received.

BG.23.077 Strategy and Development Session Follow Up

.01 Board and Chair Objectives: Action Plan

Received: Document BG/055/23a

Reported: The Chair thanked members for the helpful discussion at the January Strategy and Development Day which had informed this final draft of the Board and Chair's Objectives for 2024. He reported that he and the Clerk had conferred on the logistics of holding a bi-annual survey to secure informal feedback on governors' satisfaction and had agreed that November and July would be the optimal timing.

Agreed: **To approve the Board and Chair Objectives: Action Plan**

.02 Strategy Development

Received: *Document BG/055/23b*

Reported: The Vice-Chancellor confirmed that the report presented a factual account of discussion at the Strategy and Development Day and there was no further information to add.

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

- In response to a question about ambitions for Research in the next Strategic Plan, the Vice-Chancellor noted that this theme had formed part of the discussion during January's strategy development event. The Vice-Chancellor confirmed that the relevant extract from the day's write-up would be circulated to governors separately via the Clerk.

Action: Clerk

- Responsibility for the production of the Strategic Plan lies with the entire Executive team and will not be materially affected by the departures of the DVC or the Director of Strategic Planning. However, the incoming Director will be charged with the operational development and monitoring of the Plan and members' were asked to be cognisant of this. In the interim, the PVC (Marketing, Student Recruitment and Student Administration) will lead on strategic planning, supported by other members of Directorate.
- Following approval of the timeframe outline, the Directorate team will add more detail in time for the July meeting to allow governors to understand the forthcoming process. This will include key steps such as developing the vision, incorporating key issues which matter to stakeholders, engaging student and staff stakeholders, and identifying how and when an operational action plan underpinning the Strategy will be developed.
- The Audit Committee has begun a review of risk appetite models, which will be presented to the Board in July. Committee members had observed clear links between any model and the key strategic

drivers. Members noted that this will be a core feature of the discussion in July.

- Governors noted that the balance of topics on the meeting agenda had been particularly broad, reflecting a cross-section of the University's activity. They observed that this was helpful in facilitating their understanding of the strategic context. The Chair agreed and invited governors to consider this when reviewing the business schedule.

Agreed: **To approve the Strategy Development timeline**

BG.23.078 Matters arising not included elsewhere on the agenda

None.

SECTION A ITEMS

BG.23.079 Vice-Chancellor's Report

Received: *Document BG/056/23*

Reported: The Vice-Chancellor introduced the report, highlighting that there had been some improvement in the figures presented in the week since paper circulation. The Vice-Chancellor also corrected a typographical error in Table 1, confirming that the 2021/22-2023/24 variation for Pre-Registration Nursing was +60.6 as opposed to -60.6.

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

- Variations in departmental size are normal aspects of university management, and reflect trends in applicant interest. The most recent wave of changes respond to the Government's FE policy, particularly the reduction of A Level subjects, BTECs and the introduction of the English Baccalaureate. The University dedicates significant resource to mapping and analysing trends in applicant behaviours to ensure that provision matches demand.

Where adjustments to provision are required at Edge Hill, the strategy is to redeploy and retain talented staff wherever possible,

allowing flexibility to scale up if trends shift again. The PVC Deans of Faculties provide outstanding staff resource management.

- **[Exempt from publication – commercial interests]**

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

BG.23.080 Student Report

Received: Document BG/057/23

Reported: The Students' Union (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:

- The Union's sabbatical officer structure is returning to a model of one elected President for each faculty. Students at the Manchester campus will be represented by the President for Health, Social Care and Medicine.
- Governors welcomed the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Misconduct Awareness (DASMA) initiative, which sought to raise awareness, and provide support to survivors. Members noted the reference to 'policy change' and asked the SU representative to seek clarification on whether this referred to a desire for action locally.

Action: SU Representative

- The SU's new housing platform, Student Pad, launched in January and has achieved over 20,000 views in its first month in operation. The SU Chief Executive expressed hope that it will encourage local landlords to ensure that their properties are well managed and maintained.

Governors noted that the Government was likely to introduce legislation to strengthen standards of private sector rental accommodation. Whilst higher standards can only be welcomed, any perceived additional burden may incur contraction of supply, particularly in areas like Ormskirk where there is limited alternative provision. Whilst governors observed the mitigating

factor of the University's new on-campus accommodation, they encouraged managers to ensure that the risk of increased regulation of private housing is recorded and monitored appropriately.

Action: Director of Strategic Planning

Agreed: To receive the Student Report.

BG.23.081 Research Report

Received: Document BG/058/23

Reported: The PVC (Research) and Dean of Arts & Sciences (PVC (Research)) confirmed that the report remained accurate.

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

- Research councils and funding bodies tend to favour consortia arrangements for larger grants, including both consortia of universities and disciplines. The University's recent £2.5m award is for a multidisciplinary project bringing together practitioners and researchers from the arts, sports, education and healthcare. Another grant will support researchers from the UK, Romania and the Netherlands to develop a proposal for EU Horizon funding.
- The University's research ambitions are intrinsically linked to its corporate brand. Its strengths lie in health, wealth creation and product innovation, the latter particularly supported by the Productivity and Innovation Centre. The PVC (Research) detailed a planned venture with a regional partner which may scale up to a long-term project with national or international impact in sustainable farming.
- The University has developed a workforce allocation model to support academic colleagues to undertake both research and teaching activities. This supportive approach is particularly key in vocational areas where staff may have been drawn from professional settings and could lack confidence in building their research profile and practice. The PVC (Research) stated an aim to increase the proportion of staff submitted to the next REF from 53% in 2021 to 60%.

The Student Representative asked whether the workforce allocation model may negatively impact on the student experience if staff attention was diverted to research. She was assured by the PVC (Research) that research activity is necessary to ensure that colleagues' expertise is well-informed and current. This feeds back to students through cutting-edge teaching, and protects the quality of EHU degrees.

- The rate of PhD completions was significantly affected by pandemic restrictions, which had prevented students, particularly in the sciences, from accessing the specialist equipment required for their research. These students are now all heading for completion, meaning that the articulated target (40) will likely be realised on schedule.
- Governors recognised the high-quality of the Research Report and the step-change in the University's research profile over the past 10 years. This is fundamental to the University's developing brand and reputation and the Research Office was applauded for their support for this.

Agreed: To receive the Research Report

BG.23.082 Follow Up: Internal Audit Assignment (Faculty of Health, Social Care & Medicine NSS)

Received: Document BG/059/23

Reported: The Chair of the Audit Committee introduced the report on the deep dive activity commissioned by the Board of Governors. He informed governors that the Committee had directed internal auditors to report on how the Faculty had developed, its current position, and where it should progress further. The Audit Committee had convened that afternoon and held robust discussion. There was some pushback from the Committee on the management responses provided, but sufficient assurance was provided by Committee officers to mitigate these concerns.

The Committee had concluded that the report was reasonable, but that further enhancement was required in two areas:

1. Communications between the University and students, particularly those in placement settings

2. Consolidation of action plans to ensure that staff were not overburdened by the need to action and report on multiple different projects.

Both recommendations had been accepted in the meeting by management representatives. The Chair of Audit Committee confirmed that the Committee had concluded its work in scrutinising the report and assessing the risks presented.

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

- The Chair thanked the Audit Committee for their work in managing the internal audit deep dive, and managers for their responsiveness to the issues raised. Governors noted that the NSS 2024 cycle was now open for responses, and that the results publication date had not yet been communicated to providers.
- Governors expressed unease about the efficacy of actions implemented earlier in the programme given the results received in NSS 2023, and sought assurance on how current actions are monitored in real time. The PVC (Student Experience) & University Secretary reported signs of positive trajectory in the Student Voice Survey results, and the use of QR codes in the Faculty to encourage students to provide feedback. Governors recognised the commitment of staff members to drive improvement, and to work with partners to remove challenges found in placement settings.
- Student communications are a priority for the University, and significant resource has been invested in a CRM system to ensure that all students receive appropriate communications. Members welcomed this, but observed the value of face-to-face contact in inculcating a sense of belonging and personal care. Governors encouraged the Executive to prioritise communication enhancement actions to ensure that students feel immediate benefit.
- The Vice-Chancellor reminded governors of the current pressures faced by staff and management. These include the implications of introducing a new student records system, and the increasing scale of the Faculty both in terms of student numbers and research and knowledge exchange activity. He stressed the need

to balance development activity against the risk of overburdening staff.

- Agreed:*
- i) To accept the Audit Committee's recommendation that two items are progressed immediately:
 - a) Effective communication with students
 - b) Establishment of a single action plan (consolidating the range of parallel plans in place), with simplified targets that are achievable and can be delivered within the timescales set.

Reporting will be via an interim update in the Vice-Chancellor's May 2024 report, to provide the Board with assurance about progress to date.

Action: Vice-Chancellor

- ii) To receive a full Progress Report from the PVC and Dean of Health, Social Care & Medicine in September. The report will provide a comprehensive update on progress against the Faculty's single action plan. This should be set in the context of performance in NSS 2024, and any new risks / challenges or successes identified.

Action: Clerk/PVC Dean of FHSCM

BG.23.083 Student Voice Survey Report

Received: Document BG/060/23

Reported: The Chair reminded members that this report had been commissioned by the Board to facilitate Governors' understanding of the student experience. He thanked the Executive for accommodating this request.

The PVC (Marketing, Student Recruitment and Student Administration) confirmed that there was no further information to add to the circulated report.

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

- A staff member is identified in each academic department to act as a Feedback Ambassador. They are responsible for analysing student feedback and creating 'You Said, We Did' boards to ensure that students are aware that the University is responsive to

their suggestions. Governors encouraged managers to consider making this role more visible to the student body.

- Student Voice Survey results are considered at both faculty and department level. Associate Deans are responsible for compiling action plans as required, and for presenting these to Directorate. Wherever possible, the feedback loop is closed for students so they either see action, or receive a rationale for why their idea cannot be operationalised. The Learning & Teaching Committee pays close attention to results and encourages innovation in how departments respond to student feedback.
- Members welcomed the significant upturn in student satisfaction. Whilst the relativity of this positive trajectory to 2024 NSS results and sector performance cannot be known until the NSS results are published, managers were optimistic about students' perceptions of their experience. They highlighted the high response rates to the internal survey as an indicator of student engagement and satisfaction.
- Notwithstanding the positive nature of the results, the Executive urged caution in using the internal Student Voice Survey as an indicator of future success in the NSS. Further, the Vice-Chancellor highlighted that relative success in NSS league tables is based on very fine margins.

Agreed: To receive the Student Voice Survey Report.

BG.23.084 Annual Academic Assurance Report

Received: Document BG/061/23

Reported: The PVC (Student Experience) & University Secretary confirmed that the report remained accurate.

Discussed: Governors agreed that the report provided sufficient information to give them full assurance of the University's arrangements for academic governance, quality and standards. Members noted that high quality of the report meant no decision was required, and thanked the PVC (Student Experience) & University Secretary for this.

Agreed: **To approve the Annual Academic Assurance Report**

SECTION B ITEMS

BG.23.085 Academic Board: Summary Report (December 2023)

Received: Document BG/062/23

Reported: The Vice-Chancellor stated that the report offered a factual summary of the meeting held on 13 December 2023.

Discussed: Governors were satisfied by the information contained in the report and had no further questions.

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

BG.23.086 Governor Recruitment Strategy 2024

Received: Document BG/063/23

Reported: The Chair introduced the draft Independent Governor Recruitment Strategy. He clarified that, while the detail of the Strategy would be considered and finalised by the Governance & Nominations Committee, it was important for all governors to have the opportunity to inform its content.

Discussed: In discussion the following information was noted:

- Governors expressed interest in the concept of an apprentice governor scheme, noting the value which younger people and different perspectives could bring to board deliberation. The Chair noted that the Clerk is reviewing apprentice governor models as part of the Board's effectiveness action plan.
- Anecdotal views were noted regarding the potential impact of remuneration on enabling under-represented groups to participate in corporate governance. The Board Secretariat were asked to undertake research, including benchmarking, to establish whether there is a sound evidence base for this claim.

Action: Secretariat

Governors had mixed views on Board member remuneration and, to allow reflection on the topic, were invited to share their thoughts

via email to the Clerk and Chair on whether it should be further explored.

Action: Governors

- The Governance & Nominations Committee will consider the Strategy alongside a range of resources, including the Board's detailed Skills Matrix before launching any recruitment activity for Independent Members.
- Governors were asked to share any further thoughts on the draft Strategy with the Clerk and Chair via email. A verbal update on the Strategy will follow in March.

Action: Governors

Agreed: To receive the draft Governor Recruitment Strategy.

BG.23.087 Update from Committee Chairs: Audit Committee (19 February 2024)

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

- Committee members had benefitted from a training session on risk appetite models delivered by the internal auditors. The Committee had a long discussion on risk appetite and were clear about the synergies between this piece of work and the development of the next Strategic Plan.
- Governors had welcomed an update on the risks surrounding the introduction of a new student records system. There is a clear risk around the challenge of appointing experienced IT staff, though members were informed that this is a sector-wide challenge following the pandemic. The Committee will continue to monitor project risks through the Board Assurance Framework (BAF).
- The BAF and subsequent discussion had provided Committee Members with assurance that current risks were well managed. Focusing in particular on the departure of the DVC and failure to appoint a Chief Operating Officer, governors sought and received assurance that appropriate controls were in place to manage risk.

The Committee asked for this risk to be added to the BAF for monitoring purposes.

- No points of concern arose from discussion of the internal audit reports.
- Reviewing its own effectiveness, the Committee discussed feedback from the Independent Effectiveness Review, and agreed to many of the recommendations made. The Committee sought the Board's permission to change its name to the Audit and Risk Committee, with immediate effect.

• ***[Exempt from publication – commercial interests]***

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

• ***[Exempt from publication - commercial interests]***

- The Audit Committee will monitor the risks surrounding the student record system implementation, but the Board will receive regular updates on its progress to ensure that governors are assured of its success. Governors noted that the PVC (Marketing, Student Recruitment and Student Administration) had committed to providing a report on benefits realisation and associated KPIs in May. They asked if this could be expanded to include a project progress update.

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

Agreed: i) To change the Committee's name to Audit & Risk Committee with immediate effect

ii) ***[Exempt from publication – commercial interests]***

BG.23.088 Safeguarding Policy

Received: Document BG/064/23

[Secretary's Note: This item was taken at the start of the meeting to allow the Director of Student Services to participate]

Reported: The PVC (Student Experience) & University Secretary confirmed that there was no further information to provide to the circulated report.

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

- The University is not required to seek safeguarding records from its applicants' schools. Where an applicant is aged under 18, this information may be offered by the school and will be accepted. The Director of Student Services agreed to clarify this position in the Policy.
- A link to the Support to Study Procedure for Postgraduate Research students will be added to the final version of the Policy.

Agreed: To **approve the Safeguarding Policy 2024-2027** subject to the minor amendments listed above.

Action: Director of Student Services

BG.23.089 Finance: Early Mid-Year Reforecast

Received: Document BG/065/23

Reported: The Vice-Chancellor introduced the report, providing the latest figures on student income, gap savings and pension contributions. He considered that the figures backed up the budget surplus prediction, which should be similar to last year's. The Vice-Chancellor stressed that, in an increasingly volatile environment, this outcome would be outstanding and provide relative advantage against a struggling sector.

Discussed: In discussion, members noted:

• ***[Exempt from publication – confidential]***

- The reference to agency fees relating to overseas work in paragraph 18 was a typographical error and should instead reflect the University's engagement of agencies to support international student recruitment.
- The Vice-Chancellor confirmed that the increased costs in Registry relate to procurement rather than maintenance costs relating to the student records system.

Agreed: **To approve the Early Mid-Year Reforecast**

BG.23.090 Finance: Management Information

Received: Document BG/066/23

Reported: The Vice-Chancellor confirmed that the report remained accurate.

Discussed: Governors were sufficiently assured by the information provided and had no further questions.

Agreed: To receive the Finance: Management Information

BG.23.091 Capital Developments Update

Received: Document BG/067/23

Reported: The Vice-Chancellor confirmed the accuracy of the paper and noted that there was no additional information to add.

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

- Work on the Life Sciences Building was progressing well. However, mounting costs and delays incurred during the planning process meant that it was approaching the limit of the budget agreed in 2022. To protect the quality of build, and therefore the student experience, the Board agreed that the Vice-Chancellor should be given discretion to distribute spend across the various elements of the overall programme, providing that the total spend does not exceed the overall envelope approved by the Board.

Action: Vice-Chancellor

- Governors commented that it would be helpful for future capital developments updates to incorporate a table outlining the costs for each project/building within the overall programme. The table should capture the cost originally forecast for each element against the outturn (or current outturn).

Action: Director of Capital Developments

- The SU representative informed members that students were excited by the new developments, particularly now that they were becoming increasingly visible.

Agreed: i) To receive the Capital Developments Update
ii) To grant the Vice-Chancellor discretion to distribute approved spend across capital projects. Noting the increasing costs generally applicable to all building works, if the total envelope is at risk of being exceeded a request for an increased budget should be made to the Board *in advance* of any overspend.

Action: Vice-Chancellor

BG.23.092 Students' Union Audited Accounts 2022/23

Received: Document BG/068/23

Reported: The Chief Executive of Edge Hill Students' Union (EHSU) confirmed that there was no additional information to provide to the circulated report.

Discussed: Governors confirmed that they had no further questions.

Agreed: To note the Students' Union Audited Accounts 2022/23

BG.23.093 Any other business

There was no other business.

SECTION C ITEMS

The following items were received for information:

BG.23.094 Summary Report: Governance & Nominations Committee (20 November 2023) (*Document BG/069/23*)

BG.23.095 Minutes of the Teaching Staff Consultative and Negotiation Committee dated: 4 December 2023 (*Document BG/070/23*)

BG.23.096 Date and time of next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for 18 March 2024.