

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Minutes of the meeting held on 16 September 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	
Andrew Cooper	Independent member	
Leon Culbertson	Academic Board nominee	
Christine Donnelly	Independent member	
Tony Healy	Independent member	
Ann Kennedy	Support staff member	
Antony Lockley	Independent member	
Orna Murphy-Horton	Interim Student member	
Jo Nettleton	Independent member	
Paige Rivers	Student member	
Helen Stalker	Independent member	
Mike Tate	Independent member	Chair, Audit & Risk Committee
Gayle Wells	Independent member	

In Attendance

Lynn Hill	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Resources)	
Rhona Morris	Governance, Projects & Policy Manager	Secretariat
Liam Owens	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Marketing, Student Recruitment and Student Administration)	

Apologies

Lynda Brady	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) and University Secretary	
Louise Robinson	Independent member	Vice-Chair of the Board
Paul Malone	Chief Executive, Edge Hill Students' Union	
Mark Wilkinson	Independent member	

BG.24.001 **Declarations of Interest**

None.

BG.24.002 **Chair's Announcements**

.01 Welcome to new attendees

Members welcomed new Independent Governors, Andrew Cooper, Tony Healy, Helen Stalker and Gayle Wells to their first meeting.

Lynn Hill, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Resources), was also welcomed to her first meeting, and to her first day at the University. The Chair thanked members of the Executive for their strong leadership in the interim period between Steve Igoe's departure and Lynn's arrival.

.02. Guardian University Guide 2025

The University has placed 44th in this year's Guardian University Guide. This marks a slight deterioration from last year's performance though the University remains on course for long-term positive trajectory. There was very strong performance in a number of areas: the University placed top 10 in four subject areas, and top 20 in many others. The Board offered their thanks and commendations to all those staff involved in achieving these successes.

.03 Community Engagement

An Independent Governor reported on a recent Park Run event which she had attended on campus. She noted that the event had brought significant numbers of local people to campus, many of whom expressed positive views on the facilities and ethos. Members agreed

that this community engagement was valuable in fostering and promoting positive relationships.

BG.24.003 Chair's Action

There was no Chair's Action to report.

BG.24.004 Minutes of the previous meeting

Received: Document BG/001/24

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 July 2024 were agreed as an accurate record.

BG.24.005 Action Log

Received: Document BG/002/24

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

In response to a query, the Clerk confirmed that a potential Apprentice Governor Scheme would be considered by the Governance & Nominations Committee in November. If the Committee decides to make a recommendation, this will be considered by the Board at a later stage.

The Action Log was received.

BG.24.006 Matters arising not included elsewhere on the agenda

There were no matters arising.

SECTION A ITEMS

BG.24.007 National Student Survey Results (inc. FHSCM Progress Report)

Received: Document BG/003/24

Reported: The Chair reminded members that the Pro Vice-Chancellor (PVC) (Student Experience) & University Secretary and the PVC Deans had been unable to attend this session.

The Vice-Chancellor introduced the item, reporting on some improvement on the University's National Student Survey (NSS) position compared to last year. However, despite this success, the University had faced relative disadvantage due to more significant increases in performance by other institutions. The Vice-Chancellor highlighted good improvements in the Faculty of Health, Social Care & Medicine, some deterioration in the Faculty of Education, and overall balance in the Faculty of Arts & Sciences.

The Vice-Chancellor reflected on the University's outstanding performance in 2016 when the NSS included questions on student perceptions of their personal development whilst at university. The removal of these questions has created challenges for the University, given the institutional focus on creating opportunities to students both academically and pastorally.

The Vice-Chancellor stressed the importance of avoiding creating anxiety around NSS performance, emphasising that students could easily pick up on this and perceive that the University's concern meant an underlying actual issue.

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

- Visual summaries of the University's performance are available on the Office for Students' website, including benchmarking and year-on-year changes. Incorporating these visuals in future reports would help governors to easily understand the University's overall position.
- The scores for the 'Teaching on My Course' questions were disappointing and fell short of the University's expectations. This was particularly linked to professional programmes, where strict professional requirements mean that it is harder to ensure that

students feel in control of their own learning and engagement with the academic process. The Vice-Chancellor noted the importance of staff working directly with students in sustaining solid relationships with students to ensure that they remain engaged. Research undertaken by the University of Bristol (2014) indicated that students return more favourable survey scores if they feel that they are completing the survey for their tutor rather than the University. It is likely that an improvement in the Teaching on My Course elements would naturally boost scores elsewhere in the survey.

- Organisation & Management is also one of the University's key foci in improving NSS scores across the board. The University's excellent facilities and support teams should enable a top quartile score nationally. At present, pockets of poor localised practice are proving an anchor to improvement. This will be tackled ahead of next year's survey.
- A small number of larger departments have a significant impact on the overall NSS scores received. This is particularly problematic in professional programmes where the University relies on partner organisations to help provide a sound student experience. However, a small number of departments in FAS have this year returned a lower performance than expected. The PVC (Student Experience) & University Secretary and her team are interrogating scores at a granular level to identify trends and set targets. However, improvement cannot be guaranteed with a top-down approach: the University's overall progress is reliant on engagement from staff at the front line. The Teaching Staff Representative provided assurance that the NSS is taken seriously by colleagues at all levels of the institution.
- Governors were keen to better understand the University's overall strategy in relation to the NSS 2025. It was agreed that the PVC (Student Experience) & University Secretary should be asked to provide an interim report in November which includes a visual overview of the University's performance in 2024 and the core (c.5) areas identified for improvement, the plan to address these areas (including targets) and any resources required to achieve success.

Agreed:

- i) To receive the NSS Report.
- ii) To receive a summary report on progress in November. If further discussion is required, time will be set aside at January's Strategy and Development Day.

Action: PVC (Student Experience) & University Secretary

BG.24.008 Vice-Chancellor's Report

Received: Document BG/004/24

Reported: The Vice-Chancellor provided a comprehensive overview of the University's operating environment. He highlighted the appointment of a number of key management staff, drawing attention to the benefits to be gained from their fresh perspectives. The Vice-Chancellor also provided a positive update on student recruitment numbers.

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

- Governors welcomed the exceptional figures relating to student recruitment and retention relative to the sector, acknowledging the efforts of staff in achieving this position. Whilst undergraduate numbers are positive and provide the majority of the University's income, the University is experiencing similar challenges to securing international and postgraduate applicants as the rest of the sector, largely driven by Government policy. Growth in these areas would be welcome but, at this point, it would not represent good value to divert significant resource to enhancing international recruitment.
- Where students have been made alternative offers, their retention and progression will be tracked to ensure that the alternative was a good outcome for them. This revised approach has allowed a few hundred students to attend Edge Hill who would otherwise have been ineligible.
- The Graduate Outcomes survey presents challenges for a university which attracts a substantial number of students who wish to remain in the local area post-graduation. This can limit their opportunities to secure highly skilled employment, but is nonetheless more appropriate to their individual aspirations. For example, a teaching graduate with caring responsibilities may choose to initially take a role as a teaching assistant to accommodate their personal needs. The University is primarily concerned with supporting students and graduates to secure their personal targets.

Governors broadly agreed with this student support focus, but sought clarification on the University's employability targets, and how the University identifies and tracks students' needs and aspirations to target its offer accordingly. It was agreed that this conversation should be embedded in the development of the next Strategic Plan.

Action: Director of Strategic Planning

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

BG.24.009 Student Report

Received: Document BG/005/24

Reported: The Students' Union (SU) Representative confirmed that the circulated report remained accurate.

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

- The SU Presidents are alert to the fact that non-professional healthcare students may sometimes feel less visible in their faculty. This year, significant efforts will be made to ensure their engagement, including President visits to the Manchester campus.
- A full restructure of the engagement team in the SU should allow for easier collaboration, networking and communication across all three faculties. Presidents are now each supported by Student Engagement Managers who will help them to identify and share best practice. The ambition is to create better opportunities for all students in 2024/25.
- The SU Comms Team is currently working with students in the Faculty of Health, Social Care and Medicine to create short films depicting student stories. These will be shared with Governors once finalised.

Action: SU Representative

- Following a request from governors on the absence of the SU's Data Dashboard, the SU Representative agreed to discuss this with SU staff to explore whether it could be reintroduced to future reports.

Action: SU Representative

- Members welcomed the inclusion of an SU presentation to the Board's schedule of business for June 2025.

Agreed: To receive the Student Report.

BG.24.010 Succession Planning Update

Received: Document BG/006/24

Reported: The Chair introduced the report which updated Governors on plans following the Vice-Chancellor's resignation. He acknowledged the significant efforts being made by members of the Executive to maintain stability and promote business as usual. He also highlighted work undertaken by the Clerk, PVC (Marketing, Student Recruitment & Student Administration) and Director of HR to support the Vice-Chancellor Resignation and Recruitment Committee (VCRR).

Since the paper's circulation, the Chair had led four briefing sessions for staff, which had been well received and provided helpful insight which would inform VCRR discussions. The transparent approach adopted by the Board will be reinforced by a recruitment hub hosted on Sharepoint to facilitate staff communications.

The VCRR's attention will now turn to working with Perrett Laver to develop the candidate information pack. The whole Board will be given an opportunity to comment on this pack prior to its launch in the week commencing 21 October.

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

- The Interview Panel has not yet been identified but would likely be members of the VCRR plus representatives of core stakeholder groups. The interview format will be determined by the VCRR in light of advice from Perrett Laver. All governors will be invited to take part in the assessment activities and were asked to hold 10 and 11 February in diaries.

Action: Governors

- The Board and the University must continue to focus on standard business, including the development of the next Strategic Plan. Whilst this means that the draft Plan will be at a fairly advanced

stage by the time the new Vice-Chancellor is identified, there will still be ample opportunity for them to influence the final version.

- An interim Vice-Chancellor will be required, given the current Vice-Chancellor will vacate his post before the interviews take place. This matter is on the VCRR agenda, and an update will be provided to the Board in due course.

Agreed: To receive the Succession Planning Update.

BG.24.011 Capital Projects: Progress Report

Received: Document BG/007/24

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

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

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

- A full evaluation will be undertaken once building work is completed, including a lessons learned exercise, consideration of realisable benefits, and a review of the project against the business case.
- Governors lauded the Vice-Chancellor, Director of Capital Developments and other staff involved in the process for their significant efforts to protect the University's interests and ensure progress. The maintenance of facilities staff on the University's payroll was highlighted as a particular strength in enabling work to continue rather than requiring further contractors.
- The Vice-Chancellor will provide the Chair with a full progress report at the end of the month, which will be shared with all governors.

Action: Vice-Chancellor/Chair

Agreed: To receive the Capital Projects: Progress Report.

BG.24.012 Student Outcomes and Graduate Outcomes Survey Results

Received: Document BG/008/24

Reported: The PVC (Marketing, Student Recruitment & Student Administration) confirmed that the report was a matter of fact based on published data provided by the Office for Students and the Higher Education Statistics Agency. This year's report outlines the outcomes of students who graduated in 2021/22. The University was top in the North West for graduates in employment. He reminded members that the Graduate Outcomes Survey represents incomplete data: the sector response level is only 44%. While Edge Hill's is better at 51.7%, it is still a poor indicator of many students' employment outcomes.

In relation to the Student Outcomes data, the University performs significantly above threshold for B3 continuation and progression. There is a clear indication of trajectory across the 4-year average used for institutional performance measurement.

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

- At enrolment each year, students are asked a set of career readiness questions to gauge their perception of their employability requirements. The aim is to support students to progress towards the 'Compete' stage by their final year.
- While the institutional position on Graduate Outcomes is very positive, there are some individual subject areas which are more challenging. In many cases, this is because of small numbers of students on the programme, meaning each individual carries more weight proportionately. Members noted that this was an issue for the whole sector: 118 of 172 providers failed to meet benchmark on at least one split metric last year.
- A governor observed that highly skilled employment included only 72% of Edge Hill graduates, meaning that the University placed only 63rd for high-level employability in one key league table. The Vice-Chancellor suggested that an 80% target for this metric would be reasonable.
- Members noted that some students on non-vocational programmes have low employment aspirations. Support is provided both through

the curriculum and central support to increase awareness of the career opportunities available to graduates of these programmes.

- In relation to the B3 Progression data provided in Table 2, Governors welcomed the 3-year figures showing internal trajectory but thought it would be further enhanced by the inclusion of comparative figures at a national level. This will be introduced to the report from 2025.

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

Agreed: To receive the Student Outcomes and Graduate Outcomes Survey Results.

SECTION B ITEMS

BG.24.013 SU Operating Budget 2024/25

Received: Document BG/009/24

Reported: Due to the SU Chief Executive's unavoidable absence, it was agreed that all queries on the SU Operating Budget 2024/25 should be emailed to the Clerk and referred to the SU for response via next month's Student Report. All members confirmed that there were no queries which required a more urgent response.

Action: Governors/Clerk

Agreed: To receive the SU Operating Budget 2024/25.

BG.24.014 Academic Board Summary (July 2024)

Received: Document BG/010/24

Reported: The Vice-Chancellor confirmed that the report presented a factual account of the Academic Board meeting held in July 2024.

Discussed: Members were assured by the information provided and had no additional questions.

Agreed: To receive the Academic Board Summary (July 2024).

BG.24.015 OfS Annual Assurance Report

Received: Document BG/011/24

Reported: The Clerk introduced the item and confirmed that there was no information to add to the circulated report.

Discussed: Members were assured by the information provided and had no additional questions.

Agreed: **To confirm that the Governing Body is assured by the University's arrangements to ensure compliance with the Office for Students Regulatory Framework.**

BG.24.016 Board Statement of Primary Responsibilities/Business Schedule 2024/25

Received: Document BG/012/24

Reported: The Clerk introduced the item noting that Governors were being asked to confirm the Board Statement of Primary Responsibilities for a three-year period. In relation to the Business Schedule for this academic year, she observed that this would be adjusted to incorporate the earlier decision to add an interim report on the NSS in November.

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

- Governors suggested that a future presentation on graduate employability may support governors to understand the University's aims and how activities beyond teaching, including research and knowledge exchange, can impact on graduate outcomes.
- Members will consider an annual update on progress against the Access & Participation Plan in May 2025.
- The Board's schedule is designed to provide some structure to the year and allow Governors to influence the Board's business. However, the schedule remains live and Governors may suggest an item to the Clerk at any time.

Agreed: i) To approve the Board Statement of Primary Responsibilities.
ii) To endorse the Business Schedule 2024/25, subject to the inclusion of a presentation on graduate employability.

Action: Clerk.

BG.24.017 Committee Chair Update: Audit & Risk Committee (16 September 2024)

Reported: The Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee updated members on that afternoon's meeting, highlighting the following items:

- Committee members received a presentation from the Head of Risk, Assurance & Business Support on the 4Risk system recently adopted to co-locate the University's risk management mechanisms. Early conversations took place on how Governors may use the system to understand the University's strategic risk profile.
- The Committee received two internal audit assignment reports, both of which gave a substantial assurance opinion.
- The Internal Auditor's Annual Report was very positive, stating that the University 'has an adequate and effective framework for risk management, governance, internal control and economy, efficiency and effectiveness'.
- Committee members updated the Committee's Terms of Reference and agreed objectives for the year.
- Members noted the University's effective and prompt response to a recent hacking incident. They were confident that the approach had been sound and demonstrated the effectiveness of internal controls.

Discussed: Members were assured by the information provided and had no additional questions.

Agreed: To receive the Committee Chair's Update.

BG.24.018 Remuneration Committee: Chair

[Secretary's Note: Antony Lockley left the meeting room for this item]

Received: Document BG/013/24

Reported: The Chair introduced the item. He reminded Governors that Louise Robinson, Chair of the Remuneration Committee, would reach the end of her final term on the Board in November. He recommended to the Board that Antony Lockley assume the Chair of the Remuneration Committee in order to ensure continuity and an effective transition. Antony has been a member of the Committee for two years, and has a

sound understanding of public sector senior pay and conditions from his employment and previous trustee positions.

Discussed: In discussion, members were unanimous in agreeing the recommendation, noting Antony's skills and relevant expertise.

Agreed: **To approve Antony Lockley as Chair of the Remuneration Committee for a three-year term in the first instance.**

BG.24.019 Any other business

The Chair reminded Governors that the October meeting will start at the earlier time of 5:00pm to accommodate a presentation from Jisc.

SECTION C ITEMS

The following items were received for information:

BG.24.020 Committee Summary Reports (*Document BG/014/24*):

- **Audit & Risk Committee (17 June 2024)**
- **Governance & Nominations Committee (27 June 2024)**

BG.24.021 Anticipated Financial Outturn for the Year to 31 July 2024
(*Document BG/015/24*)

BG.24.022 Board Effectiveness Action Plan: Update (*Document BG/016/24*)

BG.24.023 Minutes of the Teaching Staff Consultative and Negotiation Committee dated: 28 June 2024 (*Document BG/017/24*)

BG.24.024 Minutes of the Health, Safety and Environment Committee dated: 26 July 2024 (*Document BG/018/24*)

BG.24.025 Date and time of next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for 21 October 2024.