

## BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2022

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### Present

Clive Edwards	Independent member	Chair of the Board
Helen Smallbone		Clerk to the Board
Ben Broadhurst	Student member	Students' Union
Julian Bucknall	Independent member	
John Cater	Ex-officio	Vice-Chancellor
Graeme Collinge	Independent member	
Christine Donnelly	Independent member	
Clive Elliott	Independent member	Chair-Elect
Amanda Fulford	Teaching staff member	
Lisa Greenhalgh	Independent member	Vice-Chair; Chair Audit Committee
Lauren King	Student member	
Antony Lockley	Independent member	
Maxine Melling	Independent member	
Jane Moore	Academic Board nominee	
Jo Nettleton	Independent member	
Louise Robinson	Independent member	
Mike Tate	Independent member	

### In attendance

Lynda Brady	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) & University Secretary	
Steve Igoe	Deputy Vice-Chancellor	
Paul Malone	Chief Executive, EHSU	
Rhona Morris	Executive Officer: Governance, Projects and Policy	Secretariat

### Apologies

Mike Rush	Independent member
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## BG.22.002 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest.

## BG.22.003 Chair's Announcements

### *.01 Board Membership*

- Following a successful recruitment round, the Governor Appointments Panel had recommended Antony Lockley and Maxine Melling be accepted to the Board as independent governors. Both candidates had confirmed their fit and proper person status and pre-appointment checks had been undertaken. Based on these assurances and in view of the individual biographies which had been shared in advance of the meeting, **governors were pleased to confirm the appointments.**

Members extended a warm welcome to Antony and Maxine.

### *.02 Board Leadership*

- Following a competitive recruitment process, the Board was pleased to accept the recommendation that Mike Tate be appointed as Chair of Audit Committee for a term of three years in the first instance.
- In view of a recommendation from the Governance and Nominations Committee, the Board was pleased to confirm Louise Robinson as Vice-Chair of the Board to November 2023.

Both governors will commence their new roles from 28 November 2022.

### *.03 New meeting arrangements*

- In line with the approach agreed in July, presenters will only introduce their reports if there is new information to impart. Otherwise, the Chair will immediately open items for questions.
- The Board may also decide that, where sufficient information is provided in the papers, an item can pass without further

discussion. These items will be determined by governors in a private pre-meeting.

***.04 Exempt from publication: Confidential***

**BG.22.004 Chair's Action**

*.01 New minimum wage at EHU – 1 August 2022*

The Chair had approved the Vice-Chancellor's proposal to introduce a new minimum hourly wage of £11.00 in an effort to mitigate some of the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis on the University's lowest paid staff. This will result in a cost of approximately £150,000 per annum including on-costs; which is not material in terms of the University's budget, but may well be very significant for the individuals benefitting from the increase.

The Chair-Elect was also consulted on, and welcomed, this proposal.

In response to a governor's question, the Vice-Chancellor confirmed that the amount was in excess of both the National Living Wage and Real Living Wage set by the Living Wage Foundation; reflecting Edge Hill's particular commitment to supporting its community.

**BG.22.005 Minutes of the previous meeting**

*Received: Document BG/020/22*

The minutes of the meetings held on 11 July 2022 were agreed as accurate records.

**BG.22.006 Action Log**

*Received: Document BG/021/22*

All items were noted as either actioned or in progress.

The Action Log was received.

**BG.22.007 Matters arising not included elsewhere on the agenda**

*.01 WLBC/EHU Forum*

*Reported:* The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) reported on a positive meeting between the University and the Chief Executive Officer of West Lancashire Borough Council (WLBC). This had resulted in agreement to disestablish the WLBC:EHU forum in favour of a more agile approach to maintaining relationships between the organisations.

*Discussed:* In discussion, the following points were noted:

- **Exempt from publication: Confidential**
- The University's SustainNET Group will convene a large event in May 2023, bringing together local authorities and community groups from around the region. The DVC is working closely with the Chair of the group to ensure maximum benefit for the University. All governors will be welcome to attend.

<b>SECTION A ITEMS</b>
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**BG.22.008 Vice-Chancellor's Report**

*Received:* Document BG/022/22

*Reported:* The Vice-Chancellor confirmed the report provided an accurate reflection of current strategic issues for the University. He highlighted a number of recent league table successes, notably:

- Rising 15 places in *The Guardian* with excellence noted in some subjects
- Being listed in the top 1000 in the *Times Higher Education's* World University Rankings 2022 [additional to being named in their top 250 'Young Universities' globally]

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

- *ITT Accreditation*  
The Board offered congratulations to the Academic Board Nominee and her team for attaining reaccreditation to continue Initial Teacher Training after 2024. Governors noted that the process had caused

sector-wide consternation, and that some appeal activity was likely meaning it was difficult to know at this stage where there would be geographical gaps in universities offering Initial Teacher Training.

- *Estates Masterplan*

The DVC will update governors on the Estate Strategy in November. This will include an overview of Phase 2, incorporating the development of a Students' Union building and accommodation.

The ongoing economic turbulence means there is likely to be significant volatility in the costs for each phase. Costs for the Life Sciences Building have been held in line with the original budget, [Exempt from publication: Confidential]

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

## **BG.22.009 Student Report**

*Received:* Document BG/023/22

*Reported:* The Student Representative (BB) highlighted students' concerns about the rise in the cost of living, both at Edge Hill and nationally. He identified this as a significant retention issue, with some students reporting that their loan payments had covered only their rent and some bills.

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

- *Cost of living*

The Students' Union (SU) is an approved assessor for referrals to local food banks. In order to obtain a referral, students undergo an application process to allow the SU Advice Service team to ensure they meet external eligibility requirements. So far this year, the SU has granted 20 referrals, which is a significant rise on previous years.

The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) & University Secretary (PVC (Student Experience)) reported that an institution-wide Cost of Living Group, chaired by the Director of Student Services, has been convened to ensure appropriate support continues to be developed for both students and staff. Students' Union staff are members of this group.

University wide initiatives to support students include:

- Bespoke support from the Money Advice Team located in Student Services
- Access to the Student Support Fund. In response to the escalating cost of living crisis, this fund has been increased from £500,000-£750,000, and the process to access the fund has been reviewed to ensure that there are no unnecessary barriers
- Referring all students who are considering leaving to the Student Support Team, who will work closely with the Money Advice Team to ensure that any student at risk of leaving because of financial reasons is supported wherever possible
- Introducing new initiatives to support student engagement, including commuter breakfasts, monthly lunches, and reduced catering costs
- Continuing to provide free parking, printing, and library loans

Governors recognise the magnitude of the challenge presented by the cost of living crisis, and the potential implications for students and staff. A discussion item will be scheduled to allow the Executive to provide the Board with further assurance about the University's response as the situation evolves, including how different groups across the University are working together and learning from external intelligence.

**Action: Clerk/PVC (Student Experience)**

Members also agreed that any risk associated with the cost-of-living crisis should be reflected in the Board Assurance Framework, as appropriate.

**Action: Director of Strategic Planning**

- *SU Board Reps*

The SU is in the process of training Board Reps to represent their peers in the University's governance structures. This training will identify the skills and traits needed to be most effective in the role along with the types of issues they should present in meetings, and how to do this.

Governors noted that the role is significant in ensuring the University is able to both listen to, and influence, student opinion. The Vice-Chancellor noted that the current SU officers had already made a significant contribution, and the University looked forward to working with the new Board Reps.

- *Engagement with the SU*

4493 students had already activated their accounts with the SU, with the number increasing daily. Further activations were expected as students begin to interact with the SU.

The SU presidents and officers are proactively trying to appeal to students who may not traditionally engage with them. Governors noted that the requirements of some professional programmes and (for some students) external caring responsibilities can impede students' capacity to join SU societies. However, where possible, bespoke support is provided through part-time officers for different demographics.

- *Welcome fairs*

The SU's recent welcome fairs for new and returning students were successful, with over 40 businesses in attendance. The University is keen to use events such as these, and the forthcoming careers fair, to build deeper links with industry. The Vice-Chancellor noted the activities in the highly successful Productivity and Innovation Centre, which works with SMEs to develop local businesses and create placement opportunities for Edge Hill students.

*Agreed:* To receive the Student Report.

### **BG.22.010 Development of the University's Academic Portfolio**

*Received:* Document BG/024/22

*Reported:* The Deputy Vice-Chancellor introduced the report, which was approved by the University's Academic Planning Committee in September. He outlined the University's new strategic approach to academic development, and prioritisation approach for resource allocation.

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

- The University's medium-term sustainability will be best secured through the expansion of its academic portfolio to ensure this remains aligned with the spread of subjects studied at Level 3, and the current and future skills needs of the economy.

- Resourcing of new programmes will be dependent on the level of activity they are reasonably expected to bring through future student recruitment.
- The University will continue to prioritise three-year undergraduate courses, noting that these make the biggest contribution to its financial sustainability. Nevertheless, the continued growth in Masters-level provision is welcome, particularly as it creates excellent opportunities for our graduates.
- The University's expansion into STEM subjects is not an indication that it will no longer support arts and humanities. The University has a strong historical base in the liberal arts and will continue to promote these. However, future growth will be likely to come through areas which are currently underrepresented in the organisation. The Vice-Chancellor's long-term aim is to develop a well-rounded university which aligns with the academic interests and skills needs of future generations of students.
- Noting the links between this item and the University's Estates Strategy, the Board agreed to consider as soon as reasonably possible any capital bids planned for the medium term. This will follow a contextual session on Academic Portfolio development, and its broader impact (including wider resource implications e.g. staff base, sequencing investment etc) scheduled for the Board's next Strategy and Development Day.

**Action: DVC/Clerk**

*Agreed:* To receive the Development of the University's Academic Portfolio report.

**BG.22.011 Research: Annual Report**

*Received:* Document BG/025/22

*Reported:* The Vice-Chancellor introduced the report noting that the University's improved REF performance had increased its standing in national league tables. However, to ensure a more significant improvement in the next REF assessment, further development of the research environment is required.



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

- The University engenders a culture of support and encouragement for its research-active staff as it builds its research reputation. While a number of staff have research-related targets in their performance development plans, there will be equivalent goals relating to their teaching and pastoral performance. This reflects the University's holistic approach to academic workload, and ensures that students benefit from high-quality teaching based on contemporary research.
- Research funding is likely to prove scarcer for the sector over the next five years. However, the University's shift towards STEM-based provision (which aligns with Government targets) means we will be more competitive in seeking external funding.
- The Research Office provides support to academics seeking to apply for external funding. The resource allocated to support bid writing should mean that appropriate specialist expertise is available to support academic staff meet the requirements of funding organisations.

Governors were keen to learn more about the work taking place in the Research Office. They agreed to invite the Director of the Research Office to a future meeting to provide the Board with an understanding of the University strategy. This would include an overview of the research councils and subjects we are aiming for, and information on how we are supporting staff to succeed.

**Action: Clerk / PVC Research / Director of the Research Office**

*Agreed:*

- To receive the Research: Annual Report.
- To invite the Director of the Research Office to present at a future meeting.

**BG.22.012 International Engagement and Academic Partnerships (Annual Report)**

*Received:* Document BG/026/22

*Reported:* The Vice-Chancellor introduced the report, outlining the University's current strategy relating to partnerships and internationalisation.

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

- Where the University does engage in partnership activity, it seeks to identify institutions with strong reputations. The most recent partnership development work in Vietnam is with a provider which is very highly regarded both in Vietnam and locally. The new Director of International Operations will have a clear brief to ensure only high quality partnerships are progressed.
- The University ensures that its international students are well supported, from pre-arrival to graduation. This is through a distributed model, where all support services must ensure that appropriate support for international students is embedded throughout mainstream structures. The University also guarantees accommodation for international undergraduate students, provides language and pastoral support through the Language Centre and encourages societies such as the Global Café.
- The University also requires international students to undertake IELTS assessment as part of the entry requirements, to ensure they have the required language skills to succeed at the University. Nevertheless, all students may face challenges with their academic work, and the University's extension and deferral policies are designed to support students who may not be able to submit assessment on time.

*Agreed:* To receive the International Engagement and Academic Partnerships (Annual Report).

<b>SECTION B ITEMS</b>
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**BG.22.013 September 2022 Board pack**

*Received:* Document BG/028/22

*Reported:* The Chair thanked governors and the management team for their engagement with the revised arrangements for the meeting scheduled for 19 September, which was cancelled due to the State Funeral.

As part of these revised arrangements, all scheduled business was discharged by correspondence. However, to ensure that governors were able to enact their duties to the fullest extent, they were invited to

ask any additional questions under this item. In particular any business relating to the NSS or Graduate Outcomes Survey.

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

- The University's NSS performance in 2022 was generally good, with pockets of excellence. There were however some significant challenges local to programmes in the Faculties of Education, and Health, Social Care and Medicine (which reflected national patterns and the impact of the pandemic on students' placement experiences). The impact for the University as a whole was significant given the size of these populations when expressed as a percentage of the total responses completed.
- There was a new leadership team in the Faculty of Health, Social Care and Medicine, and a robust action plan in place to improve NSS performance in Nursing. Implementation of this plan was being closely monitored by the University's Executive. To provide assurance to the Board, it was agreed that the Faculty should be invited to present progress against this Action Plan in November.

**Action: Pro Vice-Chancellor & Dean of Health, Social Care and Medicine**

- NSS performance continues to be a priority across the University, with stretching targets set at a departmental and, where appropriate, individual level and monitored via action plans. The Vice-Chancellor and PVC (Student Experience) regularly visit faculties and departments to ensure that colleagues at all levels of the organisation are alert to the critical factors in creating success.
- Major reforms of the NSS are incoming for 2023, and the University has responded to a consultation on the Regulator's proposals. In line with the rest of the sector, the University objected to the NSS including a question about students' awareness of mental health support. The University's objections centred around the appropriateness of such a question in a survey intended to test students' satisfaction with their academic experience. It was also noted that students who had not required mental health support may legitimately not be aware of the services available, thus skewing the results.
- The NSS is a lagging indicator which measures the perception of students who have now left the University, and therefore may not

be an accurate reflection of the current student experience. Governors were keen to explore the potential of leading indicators (eg internal pulse surveys) and agreed to discuss this further in November.

*Agreed:* To receive the September 2022 Board pack.

#### **BG.22.014 Draft Financial Statements 2022**

*Received:* Document BG/029/22

*Reported:* The DVC introduced the draft Financial Statements noting key highlights for the year to 31 July 2022:

- Core operating surplus ahead of Budget at £11.6m
- Significant negative impact of pensions revenue adjustments in year of £9.6m
- Actuarial gain on LGPS pension of £94m resulting in a pension scheme liability reduction from £104m (2021) to £19m (2022)
- Impact of revenue cost of accommodation refurbishment is £3.5m
- Strong cash generation from operating activities of £15.8m
- All banking covenants complied with
- An excellent cash position of £80.5m

The Chair of Audit Committee confirmed that the draft Statements had been considered by the Audit Committee that afternoon in the presence of internal and external auditors. The Committee had identified no issues requiring the Board's attention.

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

- The cash balance of £80.5m represented the University's highest ever end-of-year balance, alongside its lowest-ever debt level. Governors welcomed this strong position, noting that this would – where appropriate - enable planned capital investment activity in 2022/23 and beyond to secure the University's medium-term sustainability.
- The current cash position is lower due to operating costs over the summer period. The first tranche of tuition fee payments from the

Student Loan Company is due imminently and will be closely monitored.

*Agreed:* To receive the draft Financial Statements 2022.

**BG.22.015 Draft Student Number and Financial Five-Year Forecasts**

*Received:* Document BG/030/22

*Reported:* The DVC introduced the report noting that the University had made evidence-based estimates of its capacity to grow for the period until 2026/27.

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

- The forecasts had been adjusted to take account of rising inflation. The balance sheet shows strong exit velocity for 2021/22, but the challenging operating environment increases the need to invest in cash-generative facilities as soon as possible.
- The DVC will provide an update paper in November describing progress against the Estates Strategy. The DVC provided assurance that all elements of the Estates Strategy were both essential and affordable, ensuring that the University's cash balance will remain above £35m at all times.
- The University was alert to its ethical responsibility to invest sustainably. The DVC has asked the Operational Risk & Environment Manager and the Sustainability Manager to review the Environmental Sustainability Strategy to ensure that its targets remain appropriately stretching. Governors welcomed this approach and encouraged the University to consider introducing solar or wind energy generating technology to campus.

■ The new student accommodation planned as part of Phase 2 would not be priced as low as the former Back Halls, due to the increased quality of the facilities. However, the University always endeavours to price its accommodation competitively, and to ensure that students from low-income households are able to secure on-

campus accommodation. [Exempt from publication: commercial interests]

Noting that she was due to complete her term in office this year, the Vice-Chair requested it be placed on record that during her three terms on the Board, the DVC had consistently developed sound financial plans and delivered to budget.

*Agreed:* To note the Draft Student Number and Financial Five-Year Forecasts.

### **BG.22.016 Treasury Management Report**

*Received:* Document BG/031/22

*Discussed:* In their private pre-meeting, governors agreed that the paper provided sufficient assurance of effective treasury management, and they had no further questions for management. This item therefore passed without discussion.

*Agreed:* To receive the Treasury Management Report.

### **BG.22.017 Board of Governors Business Schedule 2022/23**

*Received:* Document BG/032/22

*Reported:* The Lead Governor: EDI reported that the Board of Governors Business Schedule 2022/23 included a detailed plan for the implementation of the Advance HE *HE Board Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit*. She confirmed that this plan incorporated key success measures and timings. The Lead Governor: EDI sought the Board's endorsement for the proposal.

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

- The Chair-Elect confirmed that he would be facilitating discussions on the Board's values at the Development Day in January. This session will encourage governors to identify and articulate the values and behaviours they believe the Board should model.
- The workshop content contained in the proposal was taken from the Advance HE Toolkit. While this was indicative of the type of

conversations which will take place at the session, the actual content will be determined by governors.

*Agreed:* - To endorse the **Board of Governors Business Schedule 2022/23** (noting that this may be subject to change as business needs dictate)  
- To approve the **Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit Implementation Plan**

**BG.22.018 Any other business**

*.01 Economic and social contribution*

The Chair noted the excellent Edge Hill University: Economic and Social Contribution report included under Section C and enquired about how this would be disseminated to key stakeholders and influencers. The DVC confirmed that:

- The University has a broad and influential stakeholder group including local authorities, MPs, government ministers and business leaders. Each of these stakeholders will be sent a hard copy of the report in November, along with a bespoke letter drawing attention to relevant information for their interests.
- The University will also provide copy for local media to ensure the wider community is also made aware of our significant and positive contribution to the region.

*Agreed:* For the Board to be updated on the success of outreach work to ensure stakeholder engagement with / impact of the Economic and Social Contribution report.

**Action: DVC/PVC  
External Relations**

<b>SECTION C ITEMS</b>
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The following items were received for information:

**BG.22.019 Summary Report: Governance & Nominations Committee (July 2022)** (*Document BG/033/22*)

**BG.22.020 Edge Hill University: Economic and Social Contribution** (*Document BG/034/22*)

**BG.22.021 Date and time of next meeting**

The next meeting is scheduled for 17:30 on 21 November 2022.