

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Minutes of the meeting held on 20 February 2023

Present

Clive Elliott	Independent member	Chair of the Board
Helen Smallbone		Clerk to the Board
Ben Broadhurst	Student member	
John Cater	Ex-Officio	Vice-Chancellor
Graeme Collinge	Independent member	
Christine Donnelly	Independent member	
Amanda Fulford	Teaching staff member	Elected/Co-opted
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	Vice Chair of the Board
Mike Tate	Independent member	Chair: Audit Committee

In attendance

Mark Allanson	Pro Vice-Chancellor (External Relations)	
Lynda Brady	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) & University Secretary	
Steve Igoe	Deputy Vice-Chancellor	
Paul Malone	Chief Executive, EHSU	
Rhona Morris	Governance, Projects & Policy Manager	Secretariat

Apologies

Julian Bucknall	Independent member
Andy Jackson	Support staff member
Mike Rush	Independent member

BG.22.050 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest.

BG.22.051 Chair's Announcements

.01 Board Secretariat

Following a promotion, the Governance, Projects & Policy Manager will become minute secretary for Board of Governors meetings. Minutes will be circulated on a draft basis within 10 working days.

.02 Publications

Hard copies of the Economic and Social Impact report and the University's Inaugural Lecture programme were made available and recommended to all governors.

.03 Exempt from publication: Confidential

.04 Lancashire Community Climate Action Forum – 17 May

The University's SustainNET research group will hold an event on 17 May to bring together key actors from across the climate action spectrum. All governors were encouraged to attend.

.05 Educate North Awards

The University has received eight nominations across six categories in this year's Educate North awards. Governors welcomed this success and noted the significant achievements of staff and students which these nominations recognise.

.06 Faculty of Education funding success

The Faculty of Education has been awarded a £386k grant to expand its successful mathematics interventions programme. The Chair noted that this funding would enable significantly more children to benefit from the University's evidence-based programme.

.07 Presentation of papers in meetings

Presenters were reminded that each item would move automatically to governors' questions unless there was new information to impart.

BG.22.052 Chair's Action

There was no Chair's Action to report.

BG.22.053 Minutes of the previous meeting

Received: Document BG/054/22

BG.22.023 Presentation

The Clerk agreed to refine the minute on external factors impacting placement experiences to clarify that the Faculty of Health, Social Care and Medicine should undertake all reasonable action to mitigate issues impacting on placements.

Subject to this amendment, the minutes of the meeting held on 21 November 2022 were agreed as an accurate record.

BG.22.054 Action Log

Received: Document BG/055/22

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

The Action Log was received.

BG.22.055 Matters arising not included elsewhere on the agenda

There were no matters arising.

SECTION A ITEMS

BG.22.056 Strategy and Development Day: Reflections and Actions

Received: Document BG/056/22

Reported: The Chair noted that governors had met on 7 February to discuss Board values and behaviours. This completed an action set at the Strategy and Development Day. The Chair and Clerk are collaborating on a next steps paper informed by these discussions, which will be circulated to governors by mid-March. A further meeting on this theme will be arranged in April.

Discussed: In discussion, the following information was noted:

.01 Action Plan

- The Board's ongoing development work has been informed by several sources of information, including outputs from the Strategy and Development Day, responses to the Effectiveness Review survey, and feedback from the Chair's interviews with individual governors. However, it was recognised that identifying some high-level targets to capture the 'collective whole' of the Board's broader aims would provide helpful focus for future discussions. Governors were invited to contribute to the articulation of themes to guide the Board's action planning and to feed them back to the Clerk or Chair.

Action: Governors

.02 Effectiveness Review Phase 2

- Phase 1 of the Board's periodic Independent Effectiveness Review had concluded, with the interim report finding evidence that the Edge Hill Board:
 - Fulfilled its formal regulatory compliance and governance requirements
 - Has operated effective internal governance reviews and successfully implemented the actions identified
 - Is well supported by the Governance Team.
- Phase 2 of the review will extend this work and will incorporate a review of the Board's relationship with its committees, further work

on values and behaviours, and an evaluation of continued development progress. The two phases will together deliver a robust and wide-ranging Effectiveness Review, which will also inform the Board's future development.

- Governors were keen to align their work on Board values and behaviours with the Effectiveness Review in a meaningful way. While the reviewer had been invited to observe the September Board meeting to gain insight into meeting behaviours, members suggested it may be useful for her to also observe July's meeting and requested the Clerk co-ordinate this.

Action: Clerk

- The Chair confirmed that the Clerk would ensure the reviewer would have access to the full range of the Board's governing documents to ensure she is able to fully appreciate the Board's current position. This includes minutes, information on the Board's values work and any other materials.

Action: Clerk

- Agreed:*
- To receive the Strategy and Development Day: Reflections and Actions.
 - To endorse the Action Plan.

BG.22.057 Vice-Chancellor's Report

Received: Document BG/057/22

Reported: The Vice-Chancellor introduced his report by providing governors with an update on student number figures and highlighting that the University continued to show significant improvement on student retention. He also noted the publication of the undergraduate prospectus for 2024. This contains the expanded provision discussed at the Board's Strategy and Development Day in January, which underpins the University's growth aspirations.

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

- *Economic and Social Contribution Report*
Exempt from publication: Confidential

- *Educate North Awards*

The University was delighted to gain eight nominations across six categories in this year's Educate North awards and looks forward to the announcement of winners in April. Our nominations range across the breadth of the University's activities, taking into account our work with the local community and industry, as well as our excellent student support.

- *Industrial action*

Exempt from publication: Confidential

- *Regulatory Engagement*

Exempt from publication: Confidential

- *Student retention*

Governors welcomed the continued, and significant, positive trend in student retention data, particularly in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. The Vice-Chancellor attributed this success to an improved personal tutor scheme and the work of the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) and Head of Directorate Office in driving early interventions for those considering withdrawal. However, he particularly highlighted the work of academic colleagues working closely with students to ensure they were aware of the full range of support available.

The Vice-Chancellor noted that all students considering withdrawal are now referred to a single support department. This allows consistent high-quality support to be provided, and better data capture of the reasons students are considering leaving the University. Recent trends indicate that withdrawal tends to be for personal reasons or the attainment of full-time work. There were no indications of students leaving for short-term financial reasons, suggesting good awareness of the significant financial support available to students at the University.

Where students have withdrawn from their course, the University continues to maintain contact and, where appropriate, provide support. For example, former students can continue to access careers support for three years. However, the best outcome for all is usually to support the student to remain enrolled at the University. The student support team engaging with students at risk of withdrawal are considerably experienced in this, and (as at 20 February) 87% of students who accessed the service in 2022/23 decided to stay on programme.

- *Apprenticeship Strategy*

The University offers high-quality degree apprenticeships in a small range of public services, particularly healthcare. While there is great political appetite for growth in apprenticeships, many providers are reluctant to expand due to the significant amount of bureaucracy involved in delivery. A report on the University's apprenticeship activity is scheduled for Board discussion in May.

- *Student recruitment*

There has been a significant drop in applications across the whole sector, despite an increasing student demographic. The Vice-Chancellor noted that this has led to increasing competitiveness across the market, particularly as providers seek to attract domestic students to compensate for EU applicants who are less likely to consider the UK for study following Brexit. The University will not respond to this by lowering its tariff as there is strong evidence that this would have a detrimental impact.

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

BG.22.058 Student Report

Received: Document BG/058/22

Reported: The Students' Union (SU) nominee confirmed that his paper remained accurate and that there was no new information to share.

Discussed: In discussion, the following information was noted:

- The SU nominee had recently returned from WonkHE's Scandi Weekender, which provided an insight into students' unions and associations in Sweden and Denmark. He had already integrated some ideas from this trip into his own work and was particularly keen to raise the SU's visibility within faculties. While the trip provided insight into excellent student engagement work, he observed that the very different context and culture of Scandinavian universities would make it challenging to translate similar initiatives here.
- The SU continues to collaborate with the University to ensure students are well supported. This includes aligning SU activities with the University's Graduate Attributes Framework, which enables

students to identify and articulate their personal and professional development across their curriculum, extra-curricular, and SU activities. The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) offered to circulate a one-page visual summary of the Framework to support governors' understanding of the scheme.

Action: Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience)

- Students remain concerned about cost of living pressures. The SU intends to submit a response to the enquiry launched by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for students on the cost of living and its impact on the student experience. The SU nominee agreed to make insights from this enquiry a significant part of his report to the Board in March.

Action: SU Nominee

- Governors congratulated the Students' Union on their high-quality and engaging video submission to the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 2023.

Agreed: To receive the Student Report.

BG.22.059 Capital Projects Bids: Phase 2

Received: Document BG/059/22

Reported: The Chair reminded members that in November they had approved, in-principle, the outline plan for Phase 2 of the Estates Strategy. He clarified that the purpose of this item was for governors to consider and, if appropriate, approve the detail of the proposals.

Noting the in-principle approval granted in November, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) confirmed that planning permission for the development had been submitted. He reminded governors of discussions at the Strategy and Development Day in January which had demonstrated a clear link between the quality and availability of campus facilities which support both academic and pastoral activities, and student recruitment and retention. He stressed that this development was affordable and essential to support the University's aspirations, including its sustainability ambitions.

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

- The Lead Governor: Infrastructure and Capital Projects confirmed that he had corresponded with the DVC on the proposals. He particularly welcomed the introduction of the benefits realisation review, which he noted would provide confidence on Net Present Value figures. He also indicated that the cost plan, though not yet fully costed, seemed in line with similar projects elsewhere.
- The SU has been fully involved with planning for their facilities from an early stage. However, governors' approval to proceed will enable direct opportunities for SU staff and the wider student body to engage with a consultation. This consultation work will be handled with sensitivity to reflect the fact that most of our current students will not directly benefit from the facilities given the timescales involved. Previous experience has illustrated that capital development projects can have a temporary negative impact on students' perception of their current experience. For example, they may believe they are in substandard accommodation compared to the facilities future students will benefit from.
- The University is alert to the disruptive nature of this project and will engage in extensive work with the SU and student body to mitigate disruption where possible. The University will undertake all reasonable means to maintain the quality of current students' experience during the works, with a strong communication plan in place.
- The DVC has started work with Facilities Management and the SU to source alternative Union accommodation during the construction period. Consideration was also being given to traffic management and the updated Traffic Management Plan will be brought to a Board meeting once finalised.

Action: Deputy Vice-Chancellor

- While the SU will be responsible for funding the fit out of their new facilities, the University will remain alert to opportunities to enhance provision which benefits students. The DVC provided details of VAT arrangements and funding that would be available for the SU building fit out.

Agreed: To approve an overall envelope of £34.9m (including professional fees and VAT) to enable phase 2 of the estate strategy as laid out in paper BG/059/22, comprising:

- i. residential accommodation (£23.6m);
- ii. Students' Union Building (£8.5m); and
- iii. external works, infrastructure, and district heating (£2.8m).

BG.22.060 Annual Academic Assurance Report

Received: Document BG/060/22

Reported: The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) & University Secretary confirmed there was no additional information to add to the circulated report.

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

- The report highlights an impressive programme of work to ensure the University's alignment with the new regulatory environment. The Lead Governor: Teaching and Learning expressed congratulations to all involved.
- The paper was intended to be complementary to the TEF submission included in Section C of the Board papers, rather than duplicating material available there. As such, there was less information provided about the excellent teaching and learning provision at Edge Hill than there would be in a standard year.
- The Head of Student Recruitment has commissioned a specialist consultancy firm to undertake a review of postgraduate taught provision to ensure that it remains appropriate and relevant to the market. They are scheduled to report back on their findings at the end of March. The Board will be updated on any strategically significant findings.
- Sustainability is a key theme which is embedded within all aspects of the University's activities, including curricula. It forms one of the core values of the Taught Degrees Framework which underpins all academic programs.

- Colleagues engaged in academic governance are able to access a range of training sessions. This is particularly important for new members who are invited to attend an induction session soon after appointment and who are also supported by individual committee chairs, where required. All committee members are made aware of the Quality Management Handbook which outlines the expectations of each role in the committee. The effectiveness of academic governance is tested through periodic effectiveness reviews.
- To support governors' understanding of the detail considered when new academic provision is approved, the DVC agreed to circulate an example of an 'Application for Development Consent' report recently considered by the Academic Planning Committee.

Action: Deputy Vice-Chancellor

Agreed: To receive the Annual Academic Assurance Report.

BG.20.061 Student Experience (Nursing): Update Report

Received: Document BG/061/22

The Chair reported that four governors would visit the Faculty of Health, Social Care, and Medicine in April to meet with staff and students. They will report back to the Board on their findings in May.

Action: Chair

The Chair also announced the pleasing news that Nursing at Edge Hill has been shortlisted for five awards at the Student Nursing Times awards. Governors welcomed this recognition of positive work in the department.

Discussed: In discussion, the following information was noted:

- Governors shared anecdotal insights into the NHS which indicated that clinical supervision for students on placement does not always happen as it should, due to pressures on staff. While members sympathised with these pressures, they also reflected on the negative impact this would have on the student experience. Governors noted the importance of ameliorating any negative impacts by being explicit about the support available from University staff.

- The Chair of Audit Committee reported that the Committee had discussed commissioning deep dives into particular areas of the University's business. His view was that the Nursing student experience was an area where this could support the University's ongoing work. The Vice-Chancellor confirmed that the University would support and fully engage with any such activity. The Board agreed that the Committee should continue to explore the potential of deep dive activity at its next meeting.

Action: Audit Committee

Agreed: To receive the Student Experience (Nursing): Update Report.

SECTION B ITEMS

BG.22.062 Update from Committee Chairs: Audit Committee (20 February 2023)

Reported: The Chair noted that this item would be included on all future agendas to allow Committee Chairs to verbally report highlights from those meetings which take place immediately before the Board.

The Chair of Audit Committee reminded members that, following a membership review, the Committee now has three new members and a new Chair. He noted that this new composition will provide an opportunity to review and enhance the Committee's approach to its business, and set out the following highlights from the meeting:

- Prior to formal business, a training session for members was delivered by the University's internal auditors, RSM. Governors had found this session valuable, and the Chair intended to build in further opportunities for training or detailed discussion before meetings.
- ***Exempt from publication: Confidential***
- The Committee discussed the Board Assurance Framework (BAF) in detail and had taken assurance from the information provided on risk and strategic performance. However, Committee members had noted opportunities for the presentation of the report to be further refined to support Board deliberations, and agreed to work on this with the DVC and Director of Strategic Planning. They recognised

that the BAF will be a key driver for determining the audit programme 2023/24.

- In discussions on its own effectiveness, the Committee noted comments in the recent effectiveness review survey suggesting uncertainty amongst the wider Board about Audit Committee's functions and discussed reporting procedures for committees. The Chair of Governors confirmed this would be progressed via the Board's development Action Plan.

Agreed: To note the update from the Chair of Audit Committee.

BG.22.063 Finance: Management Information

Received: Document BG/062/22

Reported: The DVC confirmed there was no additional information to add to the circulated report.

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

- The University had no concerns about risk arising from gap savings. The DVC provided assurance that, while the recruitment market remains turbulent, the University had continued to attract high-quality academic staff. The operational budget for 2022/23 had been prepared to include a full establishment with growth in line with the University's strategy. As this growth had not yet materialised, there was some headroom in the budget which had contributed to gap savings. However, the DVC noted that these savings were currently being used to offset other rising costs.

Agreed: To receive the Finance: Management Information.

BG.22.064 Early Mid-Year Reforecast

Received: Document BG/063/22

Reported: The DVC confirmed that there was no additional information to add to the circulated report.

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

- The minor drop in accommodation fees linked to empty rooms did not indicate that the University was unable to fill its accommodation but reflects some churn in residency, for example for international students studying for a single term. The Vice-Chancellor noted that the recently renovated accommodation in the main building was proving particularly popular and was a clear asset to student retention.

Agreed: To receive the Early Mid-Year Reforecast

BG.22.065 SU Audited Accounts 2021/22

Received: Document BG/064/22

Reported: The Chief Executive of Edge Hill Students' Union introduced the SU's audited accounts noting a solid position which provides assurance that the SU is financially sustainable.

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

- The SU's reserves have returned to a healthy level following a very successful financial year, which resulted in a doubling of the projected surplus. The reserves will be used to further enhance the student experience, and the SU will work closely with the University to ensure that their efforts are complementary to other Edge Hill initiatives.
- While the financial results for this year are pleasing, the SU's Board of Trustees will continue to maintain a close eye on costs given the ongoing financial environment.

Agreed: To receive the Students' Union's Audited Accounts 2021/22

BG.22.066 Any other business

There was no other business.

SECTION C ITEMS

The following items were received for information:

- BG.22.067 Academic Board (December 2022): Summary Report** (*Document BG/065/22*)
- BG.22.068 Edge Hill University Submission to the Teaching Excellence Framework 2023** (*Document BG/066/22*)
- BG.22.069 Minutes of the Institutional Health, Safety and Environment Committee: 31 January 2023** (*Document BG/067/22*)
- BG.22.070 Minutes of the Teaching Staff Consultative and Negotiation Committee: 3 November 2022** (*Document BG/068/22*)
- BG.20.071 Date and time of next meeting**

The next meeting is scheduled for 20 March 2023.