

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Minutes of the meeting held on 21 February 2022

Present

Clive Edwards	Independent member	Chair of the Board
Helen Smallbone		Clerk to the Board
Julian Bucknall	Independent member	
John Cater	Ex-Officio	Vice-Chancellor
Graeme Collinge	Independent member	
Christine Donnelly	Independent member	
Clive Elliott	Independent member	
Amanda Fulford	Teaching staff member	Elected/Co-opted
Lisa Greenhalgh	Independent member	Chair: Audit Committee
Andy Jackson	Support staff member	Elected/Co-opted
Jane Moore	Academic Board nominee	
Chloe Moran	Student member	
Rhiannon Muise	Student member	
Louise Robinson	Independent member	
Mike Tate	Independent member	

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

Apologies

Jo Nettleton	Independent member
Mike Rush	Independent member

BG.21.086 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

BG.21.087 Chair's announcements

.01 Board membership

The Chair welcomed Andy Jackson, Support Staff Governor, to his first meeting.

.02 Meeting forum

Members were thanked for accommodating the last-minute move to a virtual forum due to the adverse travel conditions caused by Storm Franklin.

The Chair confirmed that both March and May's meetings would take place entirely in-person due to the nature of scheduled business.

.03 Board Assurance Framework workshop

The March meeting will commence with a workshop facilitated by the University's internal auditors, RSM, to discuss the development of the Board Assurance Framework. To ensure optimum benefit from the workshop, while allowing sufficient time for scheduled business, it was agreed that the meeting would commence at 5:00pm.

BG.21.088 Chair's Action

There was no Chair's Action to report.

BG.21.089 Minutes of the previous meeting

Received: Document BG/062/21

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 January 2022 were agreed as an accurate record.

BG.21.090 Action Log

Received: Document BG/063/21

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

The Action Log was received.

BG.21.091 Matters arising not included elsewhere on the agenda

Reported: .01 Prevent: Action Plan Update

The PVC (Student Experience) & University Secretary updated the Board on arrangements to ensure compliance with the Prevent Duty. Governors were pleased to note the detailed action plan and accompanying timescales, which provided assurance that the University was discharging its duties effectively.

SECTION A ITEMS

BG.21.092 Vice-Chancellor's Report

Received: Document BG/064/21

Reported: The Vice-Chancellor introduced the report, drawing attention to the significance of the three consultations recently opened by the Office for Students (OfS).

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

- *Welcome back initiatives*

The University is conscious to ensure that students feel an ongoing sense of engagement with, and belonging to, the University. Relationships are established before students arrive on campus and are developed through a comprehensive induction programme. Further work is undertaken to support continuing students at key points, such as assessment periods and transition to the next level of study.

- *Recruitment data*

Applications had recently accelerated in many areas, helping to reduce the gap between the University and sector. In addition, we are performing very well in terms of the conversion rate which stands at 42%. Whilst this figure will inevitably reduce as the cycle progresses, the University attributes this early success to visitor experiences at high quality open days and applicant visit days.

- *Graduate outcomes 'Progression'*

Noting its importance to individual students, the University, and the Regulator, considerable efforts are made to support students to identify and secure entry into their preferred careers. Employability is a key (and mandatory) consideration in validating all academic programmes, and all academic areas must have due regard to supporting students to develop transferable graduate attributes and skills. Initiatives include work with employers, such as the Re:Action 24/7 scheme delivered in coordination with Enterprise Rent-A-Car, which has attracted over 600 students.

In a recent consultation, the OfS indicated their expectation that 60% of graduates should have secured highly-skilled employment (or other designated positive outcomes) 15 months after graduation. While this target appears relatively low to some, Governors noted the background to this figure's calculation and the challenges in universally meeting this expectation.

- *Provision of careers support*

Access to careers support is not limited to final year students, and the University ensures that students are both aware of and encouraged to access this support as soon as possible. This is particularly significant in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, where students are less likely to have pre-determined career plans. Governors noted the new Career Readiness Programme, which focusses on students from pre-arrival to graduation to ensure they are supported to identify and work towards a suitable graduate career or further study.

The Board acknowledged the importance of raising aspirations for all students and ensuring that they are aware of the opportunities available to them. The student governor praised the University's use of alumni to demonstrate how an Edge Hill degree can be applied.

- *Digital skills*

In the post-pandemic environment, it is apparent that many employers have evolved their working practices and expect graduates to be prepared to operate within a digital world. The University has also enhanced its online academic support and activities, ensuring that students develop the digital skills they require for contemporary and future graduate employment.

- *External focus*

The University continues to operate with an innovative and external focus, and keeps a watching brief to learn from best practice elsewhere. Managers have built strong relationships with other universities, the local LEP, large employers, and civil servants. Many senior managers sit on boards of local health care trusts and education providers. The University is proud of its reputation for proactivity and innovation, and continues to seek opportunities to enhance practice and build mutually beneficial relationships.

The Chair thanked the Vice-Chancellor for his comprehensive report. He congratulated the University for its excellent performance in the *Times Higher Education* Young University rankings 2022, in which it was the only 21st-century UK University featured in the top 250 providers globally.

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

BG.21.093 Student Report

Received: Document BG/065/21

Reported: The Students' Union (SU) nominee introduced the report, which focused on the SU's contemporary projects and the successful appointment of part-time engagement officers in the Faculties of Education and Health, Social Care and Medicine. She clarified that, in respect of 'Big Breakfast' feedback sessions in the Faculty of Education, the report had not intended to imply any issues, rather the aim was to reflect the SU's ongoing positive engagement with the Faculty.

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

- *Student engagement*

Recent research undertaken by Pearson and WonkHe, in collaboration with 13 students' unions, emphasised the link between students' sense of belonging to their institution and their mental health. The SU is keen to work with the University to ensure that all Edge Hill students feel this sense of connection. More generally a strategic priority for the SU is to drive up engagement in the Faculty of Health, Social Care and Medicine, where finding the right mechanisms to engage students continues to be a challenge given these students have heavily structured days when they are on campus.

- *Student Engagement Officers*

The nominations period for 2022/23 representatives has opened and, for the first time, includes a specific Student Engagement Officer role to support and represent students based on the Manchester campus. This is to ensure that our students in Manchester feel as much a part of our community as students based in Ormskirk.

- *Student Retention and Success*

The SU has a positive and collaborative relationship with the University in respect of the common aim to support student retention and success. Good communication channels exist, and the SU particularly values the work of the PVC (Student Experience) and University Secretary in including the SU in ongoing conversations and working groups alongside the more formal committee structure.

- *Spike Aware campaign*

The SU continues to work with students, staff and community partners to increase awareness of spiking. While national data on spiking incidences is not comprehensive, the SU recognises that spiking is a key concern for students and takes seriously its role in helping to address this important issue.

Resolved:

- i. To commend the Students' Union for an excellent report, which was underpinned by the SU's solid engagement in matters of strategic significance to the University.
- ii. To receive the Student Report.

BG.21.094 Board Assurance Framework

Received: Document BG/066/21

Reported: The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) noted that the Board Assurance Framework (BAF) remains a work in progress and reminded members that a development workshop was scheduled for the next meeting of the Board, in March. Nevertheless, this meeting of the Board presented a good opportunity to take comments on the BAF, and to address any concerns about the underlying information.

Discussed: Overall governors welcomed the BAF developments, and commented very positively on the work to ensure greater coherence between strategic objectives, risks and performance indicators, alongside provision of timely data. Nevertheless, and noting the developmental nature of the report, Governors provided a range of feedback on the format and presentational aspects including, to:

- Include the risk rating criteria either upfront or on each page of the risk register
- Provide a key on each page to indicate what the arrows signify
- Give more comparative data for certain KPIs
- Hyperlink to more detailed/specific control measures where appropriate, especially when the risk profile is worsening
- Reflect on how numbering the control measures and use of sub-headings could create a more easily readable list
- Ensure comments on control measures more closely match the risk trend highlighted

Whilst noting the Audit Committee's role in considering the detailed risks laid out in the BAF, governors received and tested assurance about the management of risks relating to:

- *Cyber attacks*
- *Withdrawal rates and work on student retention*
- *Support for disabled students*
- *Regulatory changes*
- *Implications of the buoyant employment market for staff recruitment and retention*
- *External research grant income*
- *Gender pay gap*

In discussing support for disabled students, a governor requested **further information on retention rates for those students in receipt of Disabled Students' Allowance.** The Deputy Vice-Chancellor agreed to investigate this and provide an oral update at the next meeting.

Action: Deputy Vice-Chancellor

Resolved: To receive the Board Assurance Framework.

BG.21.095 Our People: Annual Report

Received: Document BG/067/21

Reported: The DVC introduced the report highlighting that it sought to update governors on progress against the People Plan approved in March 2020. This included performance measures relating to professional development, staff absence, gender pay gap, staff survey data, and connections with the EDI Strategy.

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

- *Staff Survey*

The survey was made available and widely advertised for four weeks in the autumn term, and around 40% of staff participated. The DVC noted that this was significantly reduced from previous surveys, though the ongoing pandemic meant the circumstances were highly unusual and this sets important context for the results. Governors made suggestions for boosting completion rates in future exercises, and the DVC assured members that he would explore all avenues to promote better engagement. Nevertheless, comprehensive information had been gathered for all areas and Heads of Department would be provided with a data dashboard to enable them to learn from and respond to their staffs' feedback.

The University was pleased with the results: five out of the six measures tested were rated as 'good'. The remaining measure, Health and Wellbeing, was a single percentage point below the 'good' threshold, which the DVC considers to be understandable following the pandemic.

The highest-scoring measures in the staff survey results indicated strong alignment between employees' values and those of the

University. Seventy percent of survey participants reported being satisfied with their role, and 72% are proud to work at the University.

- *Investors in People (IiP)*

The University has previously held Gold IiP status, and more recently the Silver award. Whilst the University did not currently subscribe to the IiP scheme, the University continues to engage with external benchmarks, for example it is a Disability Confident Employer and holds a bronze Athena SWAN award.

- *Age profile*

The University has an aging staff population, with all age ranges over 36 growing in number over the three year trend period. Managers were alert to both the benefits and challenges presented by this shift and would respond accordingly.

- *Employment tribunals*

While the University had an increase in tribunal activity in the past 12 months, this was a result of a backlog in the courts system rather than indicating increased occurrence of staff dissatisfaction. The DVC provided assurance that the University's performance review scheme was robust and secured high engagement from both managers and staff to avoid issues escalating.

- *Equality, diversity and inclusion*

Noting the commonalities between the People Plan and EDI Strategy, the DVC confirmed that the University was committed to ensuring an inclusive culture and would ensure that the EDI agenda is adequately resourced.

- *Staff absence*

In response to a request for clarification about how to interpret figures relating to long-term absence, the **DVC agreed to liaise with the Head of HR and report back to the Board at its next meeting.**

Action: Deputy Vice-Chancellor

Resolved: To receive the Our People: Annual Report.

BG.21.096 Annual Academic Assurance Report

Received: Document BG/068/21

Reported: The PVC (Student Experience) & University Secretary (PVC) introduced the item noting that it contained two elements. The first aspect sought to provide assurance about the University's compliance with the OfS's conditions concerning quality and standards, and required the Board's approval. The second part provided an update on the University's work in preparation for the incoming changes to the OfS's regulation of quality and standards.

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

- *Student support*

The University's validation process requires consideration of student support needs before a programme can be approved. The emphasis at validation concerns personal tuition and departmental support, alongside consideration of any learning support materials and resources required for students to be successful on the relevant programmes.

- *Degree outcomes 2021*

The University has undertaken modelling to assess the impacts of the temporary regulations adopted to mitigate the impacts of the ongoing pandemic on students. Whilst the University was confident in its arrangements, which had been developed in line with Regulatory Guidance from the OfS dated January 2021; the University was nevertheless pleased to note that there had been a limited requirement for use of the temporary provisions, with just 15 cases of a 1 or 2.1 classification being awarded in July 2021 as a direct result of the temporary algorithm.

- *Cessation of academic programmes*

The closure of academic programmes is a matter which the University takes very seriously, noting the potential implications for individual students. Each case is scrutinised closely by the Academic Quality Enhancement Committee, which considers a range of factors, including whether any students would be affected by the decision. In the main courses are closed in a planned way, normally in favour of more contemporary provision.

- *Assurance on progress against NSS action plans*

Work is ongoing at a departmental level to enhance performance in Organisation & Management, Student Voice and Assessment & Feedback. Performance against action plans will be scrutinised at an institutional level through the Academic Board structures to ensure that activity was sufficient. Governors noted that it was for Academic Board committees to scrutinise these plans, though appreciated the PVC's offer to allow governors access to this information once it was available. The Board noted that this may be of particular interest for Louise Robinson, the Lead Governor: Teaching and Learning. Louise reported that she had scheduled a meeting with the Clerk to shape her role's remit, and that she would have due regard to this discussion at that meeting.

- *Placement opportunities*

All academic provision is designed to enable students to take advantage of enhancement activities such as workplace placements or studying abroad. As these opportunities provide a substantial benefit to students' future employment, the University undertakes all reasonable endeavours to encourage and enable participation. However, some students find their confidence to be a barrier to these schemes, and the University is working to encourage all students to be more aspirational.

- *Professional accreditations / employability*

In total, 148 Edge Hill programmes have some form of accreditation attached. Around half of these are non-professional programmes within the Faculty of Arts & Sciences. The University invests heavily to secure these accreditations and ensure that students are confident articulating their value in their applications for graduate work.

Departments operate with Employer Panels which give intelligence about employers' requirements as relevant to the subject area. This is supplemented by a wealth of central research about employer needs/ desired graduate attributes.

- *Consultation outcomes*

The OfS has not yet confirmed when it will respond to the latest round of consultations, nor when the new conditions will come into operation. For the purposes of receiving and testing assurances about compliance, the Board should have regard to the existing conditions of registration. A full report to provide assurance about the University's compliance with the new conditions is scheduled for July.

- *OfS notifications*

As part of its regulatory toolkit, the OfS has developed a notifications channel to allow third parties to alert them to any potential non-compliance by providers. These notifications may be submitted by, for example, students, staff, consultants or other regulators.

- *OfS inspections*

At present, there was little detail available on how the OfS may approach a regulatory investigation, though staff and student involvement would be likely. There has been no indication from the OfS that governors would be involved in the process.

Resolved:

- To confirm satisfaction that the University continues to comply with Part B of the OfS's Conditions of Registration
- To receive the Academic Assurance Report.

BG.21.097 Access and Participation Plan (APP): Update Report

Received: Document BG/069/21

Reported: The PVC (Student Experience) & University Secretary (PVC) introduced the report by providing an update on government plans for access and participation, which were reflected in the Regulator's evolving approach. She was pleased to advise that the University had been notified that we are not a provider that will be expected to undertake a radical review of our plan, though we will be required to augment our approach to new government priorities. More detail is expected in mid-April.

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

- *Changes at the OfS*

The OfS' new Director of Fair Access, John Blake, commenced his role in January, and had outlined his initial plans for the sector. This included heightened expectations for supporting the raising of attainment in schools, improving evaluation of interventions and ensuring better alignment of the APP with quality and standards expectations overall.

Existing APPs will have their term shortened and will now expire in 2024. Future APPs will also have a four-year cycle.

- *Indicative performance against the plan*

Internal data indicates a mixed picture. The most striking issue can be narrowed to the attainment gap between black and white students in the Faculty of Health, Social Care and Medicine. While this was disappointing, the PVC assured governors that the issue related to a very small number of students in terms of raw data, and that priority had been given to working with the Faculty to identify actions and ensure that support was targeted appropriately.

The PVC reminded members that the current APP had only been active for one of its four-year term. The activity it has initiated should start to become apparent in results over the next two years. Governors were assured that the University is complying with its regulatory responsibilities in ensuring that all reasonable steps are being taken to meet the targets identified.

Resolved: To receive the Access and Participation Plan: Update Report.

SECTION B ITEMS

BG.21.98 Advance HE Board Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit

Received: Document BG/070/21

Reported: The Clerk introduced the report, noting the Toolkit had been designed specifically for boards in higher education to guide them through a series of stages to identify actions for future activity. The Governance and Nominations Committee had agreed in December to adopt the Toolkit's recommendations to shape its work on diversity and inclusion, and the Toolkit would be launched in May at the Board's annual development session.

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

- *Implementation*

Work on the Toolkit will be initiated with a workshop delivered by Advance HE which aims to identify actions to bring about positive change and increase the Board's effectiveness. This workshop will be

an opportunity for all governors to engage with equality, diversity and inclusion and to demonstrate their leadership of this agenda.

- *Lead Governor: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*

The Lead Governor: EDI (Christine Donnelly) strongly endorsed the Toolkit, noting that it presented a practical opportunity for the Board to recruit, retain and celebrate diverse perspectives, and deliver enhanced practice.

Resolved: To receive the Advance HE Board Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit report.

BG.21.099 Finance: Management Information

Received: Document BG/071/21

Reported: The DVC presented the management accounts, observing that the accounts demonstrated a sound financial position six months into the financial year, with all indicators being that the University would exit the year with a positive financial outcome.

Discussed: In response to questions, it was noted that:

- Tuition fee income was ahead of budget (by just under £1m at this stage), due to the impact of the January intake.
- Gap savings in salaries were having a beneficial impact on the financial position but also indicated that the University was not operating with a full complement of staff. The DVC explained that this was an effect of the buoyant employment market and the University's priority was to reach a full establishment thus these savings should start to reduce.
- The DVC remained optimistic that budgeted targets for grants and research funding would be met. He noted that research activity varies throughout the year and attracts variable funding. The target represented an educated estimate which was not out of alignment with income raised in previous years.
- A business case would be presented in March to replace the Back Halls student accommodation, in line with a multi-phase

programme to regenerate the central campus. These halls were removed from the housing offer at the end of 2020/21, which accounted for a reduction in accommodation fees.

- Planned capital developments would affect the current parking provision behind the Back Halls, though the University would seek to mitigate the impact of this change. The DVC expected this to form part of discussions with the borough council.
- Catering income was slightly reduced, which the DVC anticipated to be a temporary state reflecting uncertainty following the pandemic. However, this loss was mitigated by fee income which was expected to be £3.5-4m ahead of budget at year-end due to excellent in-year recruitment.

The Chair thanked the DVC and his team for the excellent financial performance.

Resolved: To note the Finance: Management Information report.

BG.21.100 Early Mid-Year Reforecast

Received: Document BG/072/21

Reported: The DVC noted that this was the first of two formal reforecasts scheduled during the year to provide governors with an update of financial performance against the budget approved in July 2021. He reminded members that this year's budget had been intentionally prudent to reflect the uncertainty in the market. However, the University had performed well in the first six months of the financial year and was operating with a £1.459m improvement in core operating surplus thanks to excellent in-year recruitment and gap savings on staff costs. Consequently, the projected year-end surplus and cash position had improved as detailed in the paper, with the potential for further upside.

Discussed: It was noted that the University's positive financial performance was set against a backdrop of rising costs. This included items directly impacting on the University, such as inflation and energy costs, along with the in-direct impact on staff living costs and expectations around salary rises, which must be managed in a sustainable way. Irrespective of the very positive position as we meet the half way point in the financial year, the University's short and medium term financial position will continue to require very tight control.

Resolved: To receive the Early Mid-Year Reforecast.

BG.21.101 Treasury Management Update

Received: Document BG/073/21

Reported: The DVC presented the treasury management activity for the quarter ending 31 December 2021.

Discussed: In response to questions, it was noted that:

- Banks were not offering attractive interest rates, meaning that the University was not gaining from savings.
- The University had significant cash holdings due to its financial management. These holdings provide the foundation for future business cases for capital spending which will be brought forward in March.

The Lead Governor: Finance observed that, taken together, the three financial reports presented in Section B gave assurance of robust financial performance.

Resolved: To **note the Treasury Management Update.**

BG.21.102 EHU/WLBC Forum: 28 January 2022

Reported: The Chair reported on a well-attended meeting of the Forum, noting constructive and positive discourse. This included an interesting discussion on the University's Welcome Week which reflected the considerable effort invested by the University and partner organisations to ensure that students are able to enjoy themselves safely. All agreed the week had been successful, with minimal problems reported to EHU, WLBC or the local police.

Following discussion at a previous meeting of the Board, the DVC had been asked to review the terms of reference to ensure they reflect the current environment. The revised document will be proposed to the Forum in the near future.

Resolved: To note the report on the EHU/WLBC Forum meeting held on 28 January 2022.

BG.21.103 Any other business

Confidential: .01 Staff update

SECTION C ITEMS

The following items were received for information:

BG.21.104 Minutes of the Institutional Health, Safety and Environmental Committee: 20 January 2022 (*Document BG/075/21*)

BG.21.105 Minutes of the Support Staff Consultative and Negotiation Committee: 9 November 2021 (*Document BG/076/21*)

BG.21.106 Minutes of the Teaching Staff Consultative and Negotiation Committee: 4 November 2021 (*Document BG/077/21*)

BG.20.107 Date and time of next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for 17:00 21 March 2022.