

**BOARD OF GOVERNORS**

Minutes of the meeting held 18 October 2021

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**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
Neil Dixon	Support staff member	Elected/Co-opted
Christine Donnelly	Independent member	
Clive Elliott	Independent member	
Amanda Fulford	Teaching staff member	Elected/Co-opted
Lisa Greenhalgh	Independent member	Chair: Audit Committee
Jane Moore	Academic Board nominee	
Rhiannon Muise	Student member	Students' Union nominee
Jo Nettleton	Independent member	
Louise Robinson	Independent member	
Mike Tate	Independent member	

**In attendance**

Mark Allanson	Pro Vice-Chancellor (External Relations)	
Clare Austin	Pro Vice-Chancellor and Dean of Health, Social Care & Medicine	<i>Attended for agenda item BG.21.023</i>
Lynda Brady	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) & University Secretary	
Steve Igoe	Deputy Vice-Chancellor	
Paul Malone	Chief Executive, EHSU	

**Apologies**

Graeme Collinge	Independent member
Joanne Flitcroft	Independent member
Chloe Moran	Student member
Mike Rush	Independent member

**BG.21.023 Presentation**

Professor Clare Austin, the new Pro Vice-Chancellor and Dean of Health, Social Care and Medicine, gave a presentation entitled '*Faculty of Health, Social Care and Medicine: Initial Observations and Opportunities*'. The full presentation is held on file [Convene document library].

A question and answer session followed, during which members sought and received assurance about the Faculty's strategy for improving student satisfaction and in turn performance in the National Students' Survey. Whilst members were sympathetic to some of the unique and unavoidable challenges faced by the Faculty during the pandemic (notably relating to placements), the Board was pleased to note that the new PVC Dean was deeply focussed on listening to staff and students and had already identified strategic themes for areas to improve, including culture and communication.

Members thanked the PVC Dean for an interesting presentation, and noted that they looked forward to being updated on the Faculty's progress as appropriate.

**BG.21.024 Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**BG.21.025 Chair's announcements**

*.01 Lead Governors*

Piloting of the Lead Governor Scheme had commenced with Finance (Mike Tate) and Board Assurance Framework Reporting (Clive Elliott). Once the role descriptors for the pilot Lead Governors were finalised, they would be shared with all members for comment before the scheme was further deployed. The intention being to have all Lead roles defined and in place by February 2022.

The scheme will be evaluated after 12 months of implementation to ensure that the intended benefits had materialised.

*.02 Scheme of Delegation*

Development of the Lead Governor scheme will complement the ongoing work of the Governance & Nominations Committee to review the Scheme of Delegation. It was noted that, whilst enhancements were in progress, the existing Scheme of Delegation was fit for purpose and could remain in place until such point as the updated documentation is ready for approval.

*Agreed:* The existing Scheme of Delegation to remain in place until the reformed version is ready for approval in the early part of 2021/22.

**BG.21.026 Chair's Action**

There was no Chair's Action to report.

**BG.21.027 Minutes of the previous meeting**

*Received:* Document BG/021/21

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

**BG.21.028 Action Log**

*Received:* Document BG/022/21

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

In response to a member's question about a date for training on preventing harassment and sexual misconduct, the Clerk reported that Advance HE may develop training for the sector. Should Advance HE not provide suitable training, a bespoke session would be prepared. The Clerk noted that the Secretariat had liaised with the Director of Student Services and Interim Head of HR to seek advice on effective materials and would continue to explore all avenues. The Clerk agreed to provide an update on developments in November.

**Action: Clerk**

The Action Log was received.

**BG.21.029 Matters arising not included elsewhere on the agenda**

There were no matters arising not included elsewhere on the agenda.

<b>SECTION A ITEMS</b>
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**BG.21.030 Vice-Chancellor's Report**

*Received:* Document BG/023/21

*Reported:* The Vice-Chancellor noted that the substance of the agenda covered the main areas of strategic importance for this month, and that his report was therefore relatively limited given the University still awaits publication of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) due on 27 October. He noted however that, whilst the CSR may set the overall context for higher education, it is unlikely that significant detail would be provided in relation to the amount of money available for the Sector, and the Board should be prepared for this information to be dripped out until such point as the financial settlements are reached for all government departments. Nevertheless, the Vice-Chancellor relayed his insights as to the potential outcomes of the CSR and members noted the possible scenarios and risks for the University.

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

- *Student recruitment*  
The University continues to experience significant demand for STEM provision and programmes leading to professional recognition. Recruitment across the arts and humanities is more challenging, though the University had sought to address this through a suite of marketing campaigns designed to reach a wider student audience and extend our geographic reach. Initial analysis of enquiry rates and open day bookings suggest that this has been effective, with, for example, a four-fold increase in initial enquiries for some subjects during a recent period of analysis.

Investments to diversify the University's portfolio will continue, but only when backed by strong evidence that there is market demand for new programmes. A rigorous process for

development consent is overseen by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor as Chair of the Academic Planning Committee.

- *Demographic shifts and scenario planning*  
The number of 18-year-olds in the UK is on an upward trajectory, with potentially 400,000 additional applicants seeking higher education places by 2028. However, the birth rate has fallen over the last five years, which means there will be a significant demographic downturn in the 2030s. The sector, and University, will therefore need to be prepared to navigate another period of volatility in the 18-year-old student demographic. Combined with this, there must be an alertness to government policy, which may have more immediate implications for higher education recruitment and the nature of provision (for example, post 16 education strategy, levelling-up, ten-point plan etc). Scenario planning and modelling would occur when details were firmer.
- *Minimum entry qualifications*  
There is a prospect that the Government will set a minimum entry requirement for students to qualify for loans to study at higher education institutions. This may include a requirement for English and Mathematics GCSEs, at a specified grade. Many of the University's professional programmes required such attainment and the University's vulnerability to this policy is relatively limited.

Referring to the use of minimum entry requirements, it was noted that the Government may seek to introduce minimum A-Level grades if the sector moves to a post-qualification application (PQA) model. The Vice-Chancellor had written extensively about his concerns regarding the implications of PQA for widening participation, notably in a recent piece for the Higher Education Policy Institute. The Board commended the Vice-Chancellor for his work in support of this important agenda.

- *Industrial Action*  
The academic union (UCU) was balloting members across its branches to determine whether strike action should be undertaken in relation to USS pension cuts and separately 'the Four Fights' (pay, workload, casualisation, and equality). The ballot will close on 4 November and the Board will be informed of any further developments.

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

**BG.21.031 Student Report**

*Received:* Document BG/024/21

*Reported:* The Students' Union nominee introduced the report noting that the issue concerning students being transferred to part-time study by Reassessment Boards had been withdrawn as the Students' Union now recognised the supportive nature of these decisions. She noted enthusiasm for the positive work outlined in the report, and in particular highlighted the introduction of grants for societies, and network development.

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

- Assurance was given that the proposed new SU building would be responsive to the needs of different student populations. The schedule of accommodation had been completed and made available to all students via the EHSU website. A fuller update on the needs of the wider student demographic would be incorporated as part of the capital bid for the development.
- The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) & University Secretary confirmed that where a student faces an allegation of harassment or sexual misconduct, they are referred to the SU Advice Centre for independent advice on the disciplinary process triggered by the University. However, pastoral support is available from the University for all students, including an alleged perpetrator. She explained that a student would not be automatically suspended following an allegation of harassment or sexual misconduct, though a risk assessment would be undertaken which might identify temporary measures to mitigate risk during the investigation process. These measures could include the suspension of residency and access restrictions.

*Agreed:* To receive the Student Report.

**BG.21.032 Board Assurance Framework Reporting**

*Received:* Document BG/025/21

*Reported:* The Lead Governor for the Board Assurance Framework (Clive Elliott) updated the Board on his work in piloting the Lead Governor Scheme. This included a positive meeting with management colleagues about

how the existing BAF could evolve, rather than be revolutionised. To ensure the BAF and related reports to the Board meet governors' assurance needs, input was now sought from the wider Board. In discussion it was agreed that this should be a feature of the Strategy and Development session in January. All governors were also invited to submit any immediate feedback to the Board's secretariat.

**Action: Clerk**

In terms of the documentation presented, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) noted that a summary report of key issues identified in the BAF had been provided to ensure an appropriate hierarchy of reporting. The full BAF would continue to be considered by the Audit Committee and a thorough conversation had occurred when Audit Committee met immediately prior to the Board. The summary report sought to provide insights to contemporary issues rather than historical data, and addressed matters that are relevant at this point in the University's business lifecycle. This month's report focused on student registration and its link to income through tuition fees, along with information on student satisfaction and graduate outcomes.

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

- The University has significant activity in-year (for example January starts in FoHSCM), along with an increased postgraduate population this year. This makes data less easy to track against previous years.
- The lag between student withdrawal dates (their last date of attendance) and the reporting point (confirmation of withdrawal) is carefully monitored. An evaluation of cases where there had been an atypical lag indicates that there is significant evidence to suggest academic staff are going to great lengths to support students to remain on programmes.
- There are considerable geographical disparities affecting the availability of local graduate-level employment opportunities, with such opportunities not as readily available in the North West as, for example, the South East. The current UK jobs market is buoyant, and the University is providing significant employability support to ensure that students are in a position to benefit from this.

- Sector-level comparative data should be provided where possible in future iterations of the report.

**Action: Director of Strategic Planning**

*Agreed:* To receive the Board Assurance Framework: Risks and KPIs report.

To incorporate a section on developing the BAF as part of the Strategy and Development session in January 2022.

**BG.21.033 Draft Financial Statements**

*Received:* Document BG/026/21

*Reported:* The Chair noted that the Draft Financial Statements had been discussed by Audit Committee that afternoon in the presence of the External Auditors, and asked the Chair of Audit Committee for any issues to be brought to the Board's attention. The Chair of Audit Committee confirmed that there were no such issues. The external audit had been a very clean process leading to a very positive set of assessments.

*Discussed:* Members noted that the final version of the Financial Statements would be considered by the Board at November's meeting. Nevertheless, the draft accounts indicate an excellent financial outcome which the Board commended

*Agreed:* To note the draft Financial Statements.

**BG.21.034 Draft Student Numbers and Financial Five-Year Forecasts**

*Received:* Document BG/027/21

*Reported:* The DVC introduced this report, emphasising an excellent financial performance in the last year which had provided strong exit velocity. He gave a detailed description of the process for preparing the report and noted the range of factors taken into account when compiling the forecast.



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

- Student number forecasts are based on a reasonably likely scenario in view of the demographic upturn and opportunities for some growth in the market. The University has experienced major growth in FoHSCM and postgraduate provision, along with stabilisation in Education and a diversification of the wider portfolio to include more STEM provision which was increasingly sought. The forecasts reflect continued incremental growth from tuition fees, but not exponential or unrealistic growth.
- The OfS return does not require a detailed breakdown of areas underpinning student number forecasts – though **more information on the split between STEM and non-STEM provision would be provided in the accompanying paper** when the final version of the forecast is presented to the Board in November.
- Noting the potential ramifications of the imminent CSR, the final report to the Board should **include further sensitivity analysis of the risks and mitigations, along with information on (reasonably likely) worst-case scenarios.**
- The University was conscious of its responsibilities to invest to ensure its broader capabilities, including in people development, and in physical and IT infrastructure. Recent investments in cyber security and plans to boost the virtual learning environment were reported. This latter investment would be supported by training and development for staff and students to ensure they had the core capabilities to reap optimum benefit from the technology.

**Action: Deputy Vice-Chancellor**

*Agreed:* To receive the draft Student Numbers and Financial Five-Year Forecasts.

**BG.21.035 Estate Development Plan**

*Received:* Document BG/028/21

*Reported:* The Estate Development Plan was introduced by the DVC who had led a tour of the proposed site prior to the meeting. He outlined the main features of the plan, and emphasised that the purpose of the update was to demonstrate to the Board that the Executive team have a clear view on developing the North of the campus to enhance the student experience, attract students, enable diversification and be income

generative. Any bids to take the development forward would be brought to the Board during the course of the year.

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

- The proposed teaching building would be multipurpose rather than accommodating just one subject area. While the University sought to develop the Department of Engineering, the building would cater to the needs of many STEM-based subjects.
- The Board would be asked to consider and approve developments on a case-by-case basis. Each request would be accompanied by a full business case, including a cost-benefit analysis.
- The University intended to undertake the main development in one block to minimise disruption to student life.
- Faculties engage industry partners in academic development plans at all stages to ensure that Edge Hill graduates are best-placed to provide the skills required by employers. These relationships also enable the University to ensure that its facilities are designed to simulate a workplace environment, where appropriate, to ensure graduates' preparedness for work.
- The University would continue to seek stakeholder engagement with its development through community links such as the EHU/WLBC Forum. The University did not anticipate significant resistance to the plans from stakeholder groups, though would handle the developments sensitively given there may be some nostalgia for parts of the site (for example, the original swimming pool).
- Board members would be updated on the University's Communication and Engagement Plan during progress updates and as appropriate if relevant to any bids. This would include a refreshed report on the University's economic impact on the region.

*Agreed:* To note that a planning application would be made to gain approval for a new STEM building to the North of the site along with overall permission for the entire site identified. This enabling activity would mean that work could progress should subsequent bids be approved by the Board.

To receive the Estate Development Plan.

**BG.21.036 Research (Annual Report)**

*Received:* Document BG/029/21

*Reported:* The Vice-Chancellor introduced the report noting a very positive trajectory across all of the key indicators. He advised that the University anticipates its position in the REF 2021 will be substantially improved from that in 2014. This would bring financial reward and a considerable reputational boost, particularly in terms of league tables and the Complete University Guide.

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

- Staff with strategic responsibility for research had increased from 150 in REF 2014 to 268 REF 2021, and the figure now stands at over 300.
- Some substantial awards had also been made for individual projects. This includes just under £1m in research grant funding from UKRI for a project to explore information sharing between international law enforcement agencies led by Dr Becky Phythian. A new senior appointee to the Faculty of Health, Social Care and Medicine would also bring a substantially funded research project to the University.
- The Government has recently announced that Samlesbury will be the base for its new £5bn intelligence and defence unit dedicated to “offensive cyber” operations against the UK’s adversaries. This presents enormous employment opportunities for the region, and in particular for professions such as computer science, criminology and psychology. This major investment by the Government and its potential for employment and research development in the region was noted.
- Whilst the report demonstrated an excellent trajectory, much of the information was retrospective and, in-line with the Board Paper Standards, the Board would have preferred to see a more future focused report. It was noted that the REF 2021 results would be shared with the Board in May, and that this would be a

good opportunity for the PVC Dean (Research) to present the outcomes to the Board alongside information about the exciting research projects currently being undertaken at the University and plans for the year ahead.

**Action: Clerk**

*Agreed:* To receive the Research (Annual Report).

**BG.21.037 International Engagement and Academic Partnerships Annual Report**

*Received:* Document BG/030/21

*Reported:* The PVC (External Relations) introduced the report by summarising the University's international engagement and partnership activity over the course of the past 12 months, along with plans for the year ahead.

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

- The University has minimum academic standards in place for all partnerships and undertakes thorough due diligence before proceeding to the initial stages of a formal relationship, when a Memorandum of Understanding would be agreed. In undertaking this due diligence, the University also sought to ensure alignment in values with potential partners.
- In terms of learning from our recent experience in the international market, the University's maturity in international delivery meant that it was now well-placed to navigate political, legal and financial mechanisms in multiple countries, and was sensitive to cultural norms.
- The University undertook significant work to ensure mutually beneficial international partnerships, noting their potential to support both teaching and research endeavours. Potential partners were identified through relationships with trusted agents, existing relationships and, occasionally, through direct contact.
- The University's partnership portfolio was sufficiently distributed from a geographical perspective. As such, the University's risk

would be limited if there was disruption to the UK's relationship with a particular country.

- The University had secured 190 places under the Government's Turing Scheme, which is double the allocation under the previous model and enables more flexibility in terms of the time that students may spend abroad.
- The University is focussed on delivering Apprenticeships in Health related areas, with trusted partners who have the infrastructure and capacity to support delivery.
- Future reports to the Board should include explicit reference to progress made against KPIs. **The Clerk agreed to reiterate the requirement for all reports to include updates on progress against KPIs where relevant.**

**Action: Clerk**

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

<b>SECTION B ITEMS</b>
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**BG.21.038 Environmental Sustainability Strategy**

*Received:* Document BG/031/21

*Reported:* The DVC introduced the strategy, highlighting that the document had been revised following feedback from the Resources Committee in June and was now being presented for approval.

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

- The strategy's accompanying action plan would be updated to include timescales following the document's approval. Progress against these actions will be reported to the Board via the Environmental Sustainability Annual Report, at which point KPIs could be made more ambitious if sufficient progress had been made.

- Challenges relating to parking and road congestion in Ormskirk were complex and outwith the University's direct control. The University optimises its space to accommodate as many students as possible and encourages the use of public transport and car sharing schemes to reduce demand. The University also operates a bike loan scheme for staff members under its Green Travel Plan. Nevertheless, the University would continue to seek to influence change in order to ameliorate the position and in support of sustainability.

*Agreed:* To approve the Environmental Sustainability Strategy.

### **BG.21.039 Financial Information: Management Accounts**

*Received:* Document BG/032/21

*Reported:* The DVC introduced this report noting that it provided an update on the University's financial performance as at 30 September. Whilst acknowledging that the report was very early in the cycle, the DVC indicated a positive position, with no indicators that the University would fail to meet the agreed budget.

*Discussed:* In response to a member's question, it was noted that individual capital developments would be requested via in-year business cases. This would allow the University maximum flexibility in the use of its funds and lessen any risk associated with major developments.

*Agreed:* To receive the Financial Information: Management Accounts.

### **BG.21.040 Treasury Management Report**

*Received:* Document BG/033/21

*Reported:* The DVC introduced this report, noting that interest rates continued to be derisory. In view of this, he emphasised the importance of investing in income-generative projects which could provide a return.

*Discussed:* In response to a member's question, it was noted that the fixed nature of the University's loans meant there was no financial incentive for the University to pay off its debts earlier than scheduled.

*Agreed:* To receive the Treasury Management Report.

**BG.21.41 Any other business**

There was no other business.

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

**BG.21.042 Governance and Nominations Committee Summary Report**  
*(Document BG/036/21)*

**BG.20.043 Date, time and indicative agenda for the next meeting**