

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Minutes of the meeting held on 20 June 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
Christine Donnelly	Independent member	
Clive Elliott	Independent member	Chair-Elect
Andy Jackson	Support staff member	Elected/Co-Opted
Jane Moore	Academic Board nominee	
Jo Nettleton	Independent member	
Louise Robinson	Independent member	
Mike Rush	Independent member	
Mike Tate	Independent member	

In attendance

Mark Allanson	Pro Vice-Chancellor (External Relations)
Lynda Brady	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) & University Secretary
Carl Gibson	Director of Finance
Paul Malone	Chief Executive, EHSU
Adrian McGillion	Director of Facilities Management

Apologies

Graeme Collinge	Independent member	
Amanda Fulford	Teaching staff member	Elected/Co-opted
Lisa Greenhalgh	Independent member	Chair: Audit Committee
Steve Igoe	Deputy Vice-Chancellor	
Chloe Moran	Student member	

[17:30] Prior to formal business, Nigel Lund (North West and Wales FE/HE Prevent Coordinator) delivered a presentation on Prevent. This incorporated training on the University's responsibilities under the Prevent Duty and included a question and answer session.

[18:30] A special meeting of the Board was convened to consider a recommendation for the appointment of a future Chair of Governors. The record of this meeting is held separately.

[18:40] Board meeting commenced.

BG.21.126 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

BG.21.127 Chair's announcements

.01 Welcome

The Directors of Finance and Facilities Management (FM) were welcomed to the meeting. Members noted that they would provide updates on activities in their areas of responsibility in the absence of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor.

.02 Student Governors

This was the final meeting for the student representatives for 2021/22, with Rhiannon Muise having recently stepped down from the Board due to obtaining employment elsewhere. The Chair noted Rhiannon's exceptional contribution to the Board over the past 12 months and high quality of the student reports she had overseen. Chloe Moran was also thanked for her insights into student life.

The Board expressed their best wishes for the future to Chloe and Rhiannon.

The newly-elected student governor nominees will be presented for ratification by the Board in July.

03. Board Survey

A survey to gather members' input to Board developments had been launched and would close on 27 June. Members were encouraged to complete the survey in order to inform a summary report which would be considered in July.

BG.21.128 Chair's Action

There was no Chair's Action to report.

BG.21.129 Notes and actions from the previous meeting

Received: Document BG/087/21

The notes and actions from the previous meeting were agreed as an accurate record.

Noting the requirement for further work on the Board's development, members agreed that the Board would convene at the earlier time of 17:00 for its meeting in July. The **Clerk agreed to review the planned agenda** to ensure ample time was available to consider the Board's future development.

Action: Clerk

BG.21.130 Matters arising not included elsewhere on the agenda

There were no matters arising.

SECTION A ITEMS

BG.21.131 Vice-Chancellor's Report

Received: Document BG/088/21

Reported: The Vice-Chancellor introduced the report which outlined the context in which the University is currently operating, including challenges associated with the new landscape for initial teacher training provision and accreditation. He noted the increased external scrutiny of measures the University had always prioritised – that is, continuation, completion and progression rates – and detailed the strategic focus on ensuring students are supported to achieve positive outcomes. An update on recruitment data was provided, indicating a positive position overall for Arts & Sciences and Education, and the potential for further growth in Health, Social Care and Medicine. Applications for Postgraduate provision were also increasing, including some growth in international.

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

- *Student retention*

The sector continues to experience an increase in student withdrawals, which is reflected in the University's data. It is too early to determine whether this is a short-term issue flowing from the pandemic and its impact on applicants' pre-arrival experiences, or whether there is a longer-term trend of students being drawn to other opportunities. The Audit Committee has recently agreed to test the University's response to these retention concerns via an internal audit in summer 2023.

- *Graduate Outcomes*

Recent data confirmed that the University is the best performing university in the North West for graduates in employment, however – despite an improvement of c.3% - we remain mid table for graduate level employment. Whilst there are elements of graduate progression which are outside of the University's control, for example geographical constraints and graduate choices, improving graduate outcomes remains a key priority for the University. A Student Outcomes Steering Group, chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) and University Secretary, has been established to drive improvement and oversee progress. The updated Taught Degrees Framework has also been launched, meaning all students should benefit from the work undertaken to ensure maximum impact in terms of the framework's role in supporting staff to deliver programmes which develop graduate attributes and lead to excellent graduate outcomes.

- *Department for Education accreditation*

Feedback following the Stage 1 submission was discussed and the University's response noted. The potential outcomes and implications of the new regime were considered at length, alongside early scenario planning and risk mitigation. This incorporated a recognition that in any event teacher training was being positioned towards 'training', and not 'education'. The Vice-Chancellor agreed to **provide an update for Board consideration in October 2022.**

Action: Vice-Chancellor

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

BG.21.132 Student Report

Received: Document BG/089/21

Reported: The Chief Executive of the Students' Union (CESU) introduced the Student Report summarising the main headlines and drawing particular attention to the recent WhatUni? awards where the Students' Union placed 1st in the North West and 15th overall. He highlighted that these awards are ranked solely on student opinions, demonstrating Edge Hill students' satisfaction with their union. He also noted the recent Student-Led staff awards which had been a very positive event, and showcased the pride amongst University staff in being nominated.

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

- *Collaboration with the University*

The Students' Union is fully engaged with the University's Student Outcomes Steering Group which aims to support graduate progression to employment and further study. The CESU noted that significant activity was planned across the summer months to support this agenda and ensure that plans are implemented by the start of the new term.

Members welcomed the Union's strategic focus and support for student-centred activity. They noted that student self-esteem and sense of belonging were key themes for both the University and the SU and looked forward to learning about further collaborative work in the future. The CESU confirmed that both themes would be prioritised in the SU's forthcoming strategic plan, which would be shared with the Board in due course.

- *Student Bar Facilities*

While the Non-Drinking Event group continues to be the Union's most popular network, there were no plans to remove bar facilities from proposals for the SU's new space. The CESU stressed the need for multipurpose space which meets the needs of many different groups of students, which contains, but is not dominated by, bar facilities. He drew governors' attention to the Best Bar None accreditation, for which the SU's bar facilities have recently been reassessed, and emphasised the need for students to have a safe space to socialise.

- *Data*

Following a request from the Chair, the CESU agreed that **future student reports would include time series data** to enable members

to compare activity with the previous year and track any emerging themes.

Action: CESU

In bringing the item to a close, the Chair noted the excellent work of the Union during the past 12 months, observing a notable improvement in the strategic objectives set and related performance. Members agreed, and were also pleased to note the effective and collaborative relationship between the Union and the University's senior management team.

Resolved: To receive the Student Report.

BG.21.133 Protecting the Interests of All Students: Annual Report

Received: Document BG/090/21

Reported: The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) & University Secretary introduced this annual report, which aims to provide the Board with assurance that the University is operating in compliance with section C of the Office for Students' Conditions of Registration. She reported that there were no items of concern and that early findings from a recent internal audit assignment to assess compliance were very positive, with no management actions identified.

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

- *Student academic and non-academic disciplinary activity*
Academic malpractice data is considered in detail within the University's annual monitoring meetings and at the Academic Quality Enhancement Committee. Relevant information from this work is reported to the Board through the Academic Assurance Report considered in February.

Information on **non-academic disciplinary proceedings will be incorporated into the Student Services annual report** with effect from September 2022.

Action: Director of Student Services

- *Awareness of Student Complaints Procedure*
The University has paid particular attention to ensuring that students are aware of the student complaints process and are encouraged to

raise concerns at an early stage. This work is supported by the SU's Advice Centre, and trained student representatives.

The Formal stage of complaints handling is undertaken by a central Student Casework Team, which helps to ensure that students have confidence that their concerns will be investigated objectively.

While the University endeavours to resolve complaints at an early stage, the University ensures students are aware of their right to refer complaints to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). The recent provider report produced by the OIA was positive about the University's approach to handling and resolving complaints.

Resolved: To receive the Protecting the Interests of All Students: Annual Report

BG.21.134 Environmental Sustainability Annual Report

Received: Document BG/091/21

Reported: The Director of FM introduced the report, highlighting clear progress against the previous Environmental Sustainability Strategy, and outlining plans to progress with the new strategy approved by the Board in October. He noted the formation of the University Sustainability Group, the first Sustainability Festival held in November, and the increased take-up of relevant staff training.

Discussed: The Board's Lead Governor for Sustainability (Jo Nettleton) welcomed the report, noting positive activity across all aspects of the Environmental Sustainability Strategy. She welcomed in particular the establishment of the new Sustainability Group, which brings together colleagues from across academic and service areas to seek further enhancement activity. However, she queried whether the University's current ambitions could be further extended, and encouraged the University to be bolder in its aims. Examples might include achieving net zero carbon emissions (and by when?), and exploring whether sustainability could be further linked to the University's course design, research, and partnership activity to maximise the opportunities that are beginning to arise.

In discussion, members agreed with the Lead Governor for Sustainability, noting that the University's unique semi-rural campus could provide multiple opportunities to embrace and enhance green technologies. Showing strong leadership in environmental sustainability

would also resonate with current, and future, students. The Board therefore agreed the **Director of FM should explore more ambitious targets and that these should be considered within the life of the current plan so that action is taken forward before 2025.**

Action: Director of FM

More generally, governors noted that seeking to invest in green technologies at scale could prove cost-effective for the University. There was consensus, and a steer for management, that members would be amenable to future proposals which may require initial cost outlay to support a more sustainable approach.

Resolved: To receive the Environmental Sustainability Annual Report

BG.21.135 Health, Safety and Environment Committee Annual Report

Received: Document BG/092/21

Reported: The Director of FM introduced the report, providing an overview of performance in key areas relating to the management of health and safety issues, and progress against the related Strategic Action Plan. In terms of updates to the information provided in the report, the Director confirmed that just one High-Risk action was not yet complete.

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

- *High Risk audit actions*

The one remaining action relates to a fire risk assessment, with mitigations in place to address any immediate risk. The remedial work required has been contracted out and will be resolved over the summer period while student and visitor numbers are low. **Detail on outstanding high-risk audit actions would be included in future reports** in order for the Board to have visibility of any ongoing risk.

Action: Director of FM

- *Report Format and Content*

For future reports, the Board requested further information on high-level KPIs (including leading and lagging indicators) which articulate what success looks like, and suggested they could be presented in a dashboard format. ‘Lessons learned’ from health and

safety incidents should also be included, with coverage of positive and negative findings.

Action: Director of FM

While the report was framed as the Health, Safety and Environment Committee's report, the Director of FM confirmed that it focused on health and safety matters, and environmental elements would be covered in a separate update.

Resolved: To receive the Health, Safety and Environment Committee Annual Report (Health and Safety).

SECTION B ITEMS

BG.21.136 Edge Hill University and its subsidiaries: draft operating budget 2022/23

Received: Document BG/093/21

Reported: The Director of Finance presented the draft operating budget for 2022/23, explaining the robust process undertaken to formulate the proposals. He acknowledged the challenging operating environment, including inflationary pressure on salaries and other costs – which is not mitigated by any increase in student tuition fees. He noted however that the current balance sheet position was very healthy and backed by a strong cash position. It is projected that cash generated from operations will be c.£14m, with a £7.5m surplus which, while c.£2m less than projected for this year, builds on an already very strong balance sheet. Finally, he noted the critical importance of investing in capital projects to ensure that the estate supports the development of a portfolio which meets market demand and therefore ensures the University's sustainability.

Discussed: The Board's Lead Governor for Finance (Mike Tate) confirmed that he had recently met with both the Director of Finance and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor to discuss the University's financial position. In view of all the information he had considered, he was confident that the University's current position was strong – and indeed that the projected cash position reflected a prudent forecast. He expressed particular confidence in the University's position when compared with other similar providers and noted the main conundrum concerning the balance sheet was how best to invest the University's cash.

In discussion, the following information was noted:

- In respect of a question from the Board as to whether the projected student tuition fee growth was realistic given the challenging environment, management confirmed that student number forecasts were developed after detailed consultation with senior managers in each planning unit across the University. In those meetings, colleagues must demonstrate due regard to a range of issues including the increasing number of 18-year-olds balanced against the intensified advertisement of alternative options to University, and retention trends. Estimates are assessed by central staff including the Director of Strategic Planning, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor to ensure that they were challenging but realistic, within an overall framework which provides some contingency. Acknowledging that there can be no 'crystal ball' in such a volatile environment, the Board took confidence from the process in place to build the budget.
- Given the robustness of the balance sheet, Governors were keen that the University's financial assets should be used to improve campus infrastructure in order to support student recruitment. As well as improving the physical environment, governors considered that it was equally important for the University's long-term viability to invest in environmental and digital infrastructure.

Noting that the budget would be re-presented for approval in July, members did not request any follow up action.

Resolved: To receive the Edge Hill University and its Subsidiaries: Draft Operating Budget: 2022/23

BG.21.137 Finance: Management Information

Received: Document BG/094/21

Reported: The Director of Finance introduced the Finance: Management Information report, explaining that the University continued to outperform the original budget. However, he observed that the most significant risk to note as we approach year-end is student retention and the impact on tuition fee income. The narrowing of gap savings in the staffing budget is also being monitored.

Discussed: In response to questions, it was noted that while the potential implications of inflation on staff costs may prove a financial hurdle, this would not be felt until the 2022/23 academic year. Therefore, they will not appear in this year's Management Information reports. Nonetheless, governors will be kept informed of any emerging financial risks, as appropriate.

Resolved: To receive the Finance: Management Information Report

BG.21.138 Treasury Management Update

Received: Document BG/095/21

Reported: The Director of Finance introduced the Treasury Management Update, highlighting high cash balance levels which provide a significant amount of security. He assured governors that treasury management processes are being applied effectively and in line with governing documents.

Discussed: In discussion, it was noted that following the Bank of England's decision to increase interest rates, the University was seeing an increase in weighted average returns. While the base rate is expected to increase further during the next financial year, it remains low and cash continues to lose significant value in real terms.

Resolved: To receive the Treasury management update

BG.21.139 Late Mid-Year Reforecast

Received: Document BG/096/21

Reported: The Director of Finance introduced the Late Mid-Year Reforecast noting that there was a shortfall against the Early Mid-Year Reforecast presented to the Board in February. This deterioration in core operating surplus (£509k) was generated mainly by increased inflationary pressures and in-year support for additional resources. Nevertheless, the University remains on course to outperform the original budget.

Discussed: In discussion, it was noted that the Late Mid-Year Reforecast is a more detailed exercise than that provided earlier in the year and is based on more evidence, including analysis of staffing spend on a post by post

basis. Compiling the report forms part of the process to prepare budget holders for the annual budget development exercise.

Resolved: To receive the Late Mid-Year Reforecast

BG.21.140 Academic Board (March 2022): Summary Report

Received: Document BG/097/21

Reported: It was confirmed that the report provided an accurate summary of the overall content of the meeting, with a detailed commentary available in the accompanying minutes.

Discussed: Members confirmed they had no questions relating to the report.

Resolved: To receive the Academic Board (March 2022): Summary Report

BG.21.141 Minutes from the EHU/WLBC Forum dated: 22 April 2022

Received: Document BG/098/21

Reported: The Chair introduced the minutes from the EHU/WLBC Forum observing that the University had provided a comprehensive update on its projected recruitment for 2022/23 and plans for capital development. He noted that the Vice-Chancellor and Deputy Vice-Chancellor were currently engaging with the Council in respect of planning for the new Life Sciences Building development.

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

- The Leader of the Council, Councillor Ian Moran, announced that he would be stepping down from his role. His replacement, Councillor Yvonne Gagen, is expected to attend the forum in future.
- In line with earlier discussions, the forum's Terms of Reference had been reviewed. The Clerk reported that these Terms of Reference had been considered appropriate but were not being applied fully. Noting the personnel change at WLBC, members were keen to use this as an opportunity to reinvigorate the group and asked for this action to be prioritised. It was agreed that the **Deputy Vice-Chancellor should provide a progress update at July's**

meeting, to include consideration of what else could be done to engage with local strategic influencers.

Action: DVC

Resolved: To receive the minutes from the EHU/WLBC Forum dated: 22 April 2022

BG.21.142 Any other business

.01 SU BAME Officer

The Lead Governor for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (Christine Donnelly) noted that other universities had ceased using the term 'BAME' and that she was therefore surprised to see that the SU had recently held elections for a BAME Officer.

The CESU noted the challenges associated with the term, and advised that the Union had commissioned a review of their approach. **The findings would be reported to the Board in due course.**

Action: CESU

SECTION C ITEMS

The following items were received for information:

BG.21.143 Summary Report: Audit Committee (30 March 2022)
(Document BG/099/21).

BG.21.144 SU 2022 Election Report *(Document BG/100/21).*

BG.21.145 Minutes of the Health, Safety and Environmental Committee: 19 May 2022 *(Document BG/0101/21).*

BG.21.146 Minutes of the Teaching Staff Consultative and Negotiation Committee: 15 February 2022 *(Document BG/102/21).*

BG.20.147 Date and time of next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for 11 July 2022 at 17:00.