

## BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Minutes of the meeting held on 20 May 2024

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### Present

Clive Elliott	Independent member	Chair of the Board
Helen Smallbone		Clerk to the Board
Claire Blennerhassett	Teaching staff member	
John Cater	Ex-officio	Vice-Chancellor
Graeme Collinge	Independent member	
Leon Culbertson	Academic Board nominee	
Christine Donnelly	Independent member	
Lauren King	Student member	
Maggie Lam	Student member (Students' Union)	
Antony Lockley	Independent member	
Jo Nettleton	Independent member	
Louise Robinson	Independent member	Vice-Chair of the Board
Mike Tate	Independent member	Chair, Audit Committee
Mark Wilkinson	Independent member	

### In Attendance

Vicky Bosward	Director of HR	<i>For items BG.23.126 and BG.23.127</i>
Lynda Brady	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) and University Secretary	
Paul Malone	Chief Executive, Edge Hill Students' Union	
Jane Moore	Pro Vice-Chancellor & Dean of Education	<i>For item BG.23.126</i>
Liam Owens	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Marketing, Student Recruitment and Student Administration)	

### Apologies

Ann Kennedy	Support staff member
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**BG.23.118 Declarations of Interest**

None.

**BG.23.119 Chair's Announcements**

*.01 Board membership*

With regret, Maxine Melling has stepped down from the Board. Given Maxine's personal circumstances, she no longer considers it tenable to retain the position and the Chair has reluctantly accepted this.

Members noted with thanks Maxine's contributions to the Board and her passion for Edge Hill's success. The Chair has written to Maxine to convey this gratitude and the Board's best wishes. He has filed his endorsement of Maxine's abilities as a governor in case she is ever in a position to reapply for membership.

*.02 Vice-Chair position*

Two governors have expressed an interest in the Vice-Chair position. Interviews will be held in June. The Governance and Nominations Committee will subsequently make a recommendation to the Board for approval of an appointment in July.

*.03 Governor recruitment*

Members were reminded that the advert for new governors is now live and will close on 10 June. All were encouraged to share this widely with their networks and promote the opportunity to high quality candidates to ensure we maximise the pool to select from.

*.04. Governor activity*

The Chair listed the range of engagements members have recently participated in, noting most of these are captured in the Board Effectiveness Action Plan Update. Additional to this, governors have attended a series of talks hosted as part of the University's 90 years at Ormskirk celebrations, award ceremonies and inaugural lectures. He thanked members for their participation in these important aspects of University life and encouraged continued involvement.

The Chair noted he had attended two recent Committee of University Chairs events and, while there were no pressing matters to report, **he would set out the highlights in a written note to the Board.**

**Action: Chair**

*.05 Board papers*

The Chair thanked the Executive team and their colleagues for the excellent quality of the papers and noted the effort expended to achieve this. He also recognised the additional pressure on the team at present given the Deputy Vice-Chancellor's departure, and stressed to the Executive that they may call on the Board for support as needed during this challenging period.

**BG.23.120 Chair's Action**

There was no Chair's Action to report.

**BG.23.121 Minutes of the previous meeting**

*Received: Document BG/081/23*

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 March 2024 were agreed as an accurate record.

**BG.23.122 Action Log**

*Received: Document BG/082/23*

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

The Action Log was received.

**BG.23.123 Matters arising not included elsewhere on the agenda**

There were no matters arising.

**SECTION A ITEMS**

**BG.23.124 Vice-Chancellor's Report (incorporating progress update on FHSCM NSS actions)**

*Received:* Document BG/083/23

*Reported:* The Vice-Chancellor introduced the report by updating members on the latest student recruitment and retention data. He also referred to the extensive ongoing work to improve the student experience in the Faculty of Health, Social Care and Medicine (FHSCM) and confirmed that all actions listed in the recent internal audit of this area were now complete.

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

- An initiative to make alternative offers to students who have not secured their preferred programme at the University appears to have proved a successful recruitment tool. Given this is a new approach (in terms of applying the method at scale), the University does not have data on related retention rates. Careful attention will be paid to ensuring that these students are supported to have a positive experience in the context of them not securing their first-choice programme.
- Student retention continues to improve, and now stands at 67 ahead of the comparator point in the previous year. In-year retention is excellent. Attention will now turn to ensuring effective communication and support for students over the summer period to reduce the number of students who do not return to the next level of study.
- FHSCM's leadership team are holding weekly meetings to ensure the ongoing quality of learning and teaching and the continuous improvement of the student experience. The team are also working hard on ensuring effective communication with students, particularly via personalised support from personal tutors. The University's internal Student Voice Survey data indicates increased levels of satisfaction, which the Executive hope will play out in the National Student Survey (NSS). Nevertheless, there can be no doubt about the pressures in placement settings for nurse trainees, and challenges for the NHS and its workforce. Nursing is likely to

continue to perform less well across the sector relative to other subjects.

- *[Exempt from publication – commercial interests]*

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

### **BG.23.125 Student Report**

*Received:* Document BG/084/23

*Reported:* The Student Member (Students' Union) confirmed that the paper was accurate and drew out the main highlights in relation to recent activity.

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

- Staff representatives of the Students' Union are included at all levels of the University's work on sustainability, including the University's Sustainability Strategy Group and People and Planet Working Group. The SU Chief Executive is keen for more students to be involved in this work and for a People and Planet Society that can connect into the University's work on this important agenda. A meeting has been arranged with the Corporate Sustainability Manager to progress this.
- The University does not have any direct investments in fossil fuels. It has recently renewed its power supply for the next three years and this contract was predicated on the basis of a commitment to clean energy sources.
- Liberation Officers will act as champions for particular groups of students, including those with protected characteristics. These roles will not be restricted to one officer per area, and teams will be established where a range of expertise is required to ensure appropriate coverage. Governors welcomed the paid nature of these roles, noting this demonstrates the value placed on supporting marginalised groups and those with protected characteristics.
- Work with the local MPs office is ongoing in relation to gathering her support to lobby for a loan forgiveness scheme for healthcare students.

*Agreed:* To receive the Student Report.

**BG.23.126 EDI Annual Report**

*Received:* Document BG/085/23

*Reported:* The Pro Vice-Chancellor & Dean of Education introduced the item noting that there was no additional information to report.

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

- The University's commitment to limiting short-term contracts extends to all staff, not just academic staff. The Human Resources department monitors data to ensure that any hotspots are identified and interventions made as appropriate.
- Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) are in place to support decision making and policy development, with a suite of materials to support staff to undertake EIAs. Personalised support is also available from Human Resources staff. An EIA is always undertaken for major decisions, such as a redundancy programme or other significant business case. Application is patchier for lower levels of activity, though HR is working to drive awareness and engagement with the relevant training materials.
- Governors were pleased to note the positive trends around the increased percentage of staff identifying as Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic and/or living with a disability. In respect of disability, members noted that this reflects an increase in staff reporting neurodivergence, which mirrors societal changes. Governors commended the University for being an employer where staff feel empowered and safe to report disabilities that may otherwise be hidden.
- Flexible working requests are now a legal right from day one for staff at all levels of the University. A minority of Edge Hill staff apply for flexible working arrangements in the context of the overall population, with applications in the range of 16 to 40 cases per year. Approval rates are high when applications are made.

- Members applauded the University's endeavours to develop a positive culture and welcomed the ongoing commitment to this important agenda.

In bringing the item to a close, the Chair thanked the authors for an excellent report and particularly welcomed the use of metrics throughout.

*Agreed:* To receive the EDI Annual Report.

### **BG.23.127 Our People: Annual Report**

*Received:* Document BG/086/23

*Reported:* The Director of HR introduced the item noting that there was no additional information to report.

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

- The attainment of Athena Swan Bronze is commendable. This exercise reflects a significant undertaking, and the award follows a rigorous external assessment process. The University is currently working towards the Silver grade and is confident in its ability to achieve this earlier than our scheduled assessment point in 2027. The ultimate aim is for Gold, though this is an aspirational objective at this stage. Athena Swan is important to prospective and current staff, particularly in academic communities given its focus on the commitment to advancing the careers of women in STEM. Nevertheless, there is increasing interest in professional services, and the University's Learning Services department will be applying for a departmental award as part of the University's action plan to achieve Silver at institutional level.
- The apparent drop in engagement with Performance and Development Review (PDR) relates to obstacles presented by the recording system, which is not particularly user-friendly. The data does not reflect a failure to hold the conversation. HR recognise that effective PDR is essential to a committed and engaged workforce and they contact departments where return rates are not satisfactory. In the majority of cases, departments can evidence they have held the conversation, or can provide a good reason for why a formal PDR has not been held. For example, where some academic staff are engaged in two-year development

plans or timing meant a review was not due when the snapshot was taken. It is an HR priority to establish a more effective reporting system, and this will be progressed once ongoing work to move the main HR system into the cloud is complete.

- Members commended the University's work to grow its talent pipeline and noted this has the benefit of developing an engaged workforce whilst mitigating against staff recruitment challenges. For academic staff, where there is a clear progression pathway, HR have expended considerable effort in supporting academic staff and line managers to maximise their input to the application process. This includes establishing development plans where appropriate.
- It was observed that the staff population has increased by 10% over the past two years, a trend which is not sustainable given the challenging economic backdrop. Members debated the extent to which projections about an increased staff population should have been presented to the Board as a distinct request. They noted that, ultimately, the Board considers the University's proposed expenditure via the budget setting round and any questions or challenge about how the budget is allocated for staff can be presented in that process. The Vice-Chancellor noted that much of the increase had been demand-led given the increase of over 600 students during the period. However, student numbers had now fallen back and the Vice-Chancellor agreed that restraint was required, along with difficult action such as the redundancy programme discussed earlier.

In bringing the item to a close, the Chair thanked the authors for an excellent report and, as with the previous item, welcomed the use of metrics throughout.

*Agreed:* To receive the Our People: Annual Report.

**BG.23.128 Project Transform: Benefits, KPIs and Progress Report**

*Received:* Document BG/087/23

*Reported:* The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Marketing, Student Recruitment & Student Administration) (PVC Marketing) introduced the report noting that there was one item to bring to the Board's attention. This related to a minor delay to the integration between BANNER and UCAS, which had



originally been anticipated this week and is now expected by 17 June. At this stage the time delay can be recovered, and does not present a material risk to the project's delivery. Nevertheless, the PVC (Marketing) considered it was important to share this information with the Board given the accompanying report states there are no issues to report.

The University is working with a change management partner who visited the University last week to deliver a workshop on benefits realisation with core stakeholders. This led to 19 areas of benefits realisation being prioritised from the list presented.

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

- It was confirmed that, with regard to the original timeline, the curriculum management implementation is on track as part of Phase 2.
- Members noted the value in tracking back to the original project plan when evaluating progress and requested that **future Project Transform update reports include reference to the original project plan and progress against this** to enable members to understand the current position. Members also noted the value in presenting progress updates in a visual way and confirmed they would be content to receive reports predominantly generated from the project management system if this would lead to a simple visualisation of current progress against the original project plan. This also means the PVC would not be required to expend considerable effort writing reports.

**Action: PVC Marketing**

- **Interim updates and final assurance on benefits realisation will be factored into the Board's business plan.** The University has a schedule of baseline benefits from which it can track the actual benefits. It is likely to be September 2026 before the University will be in a position to quantify the actual benefits, and some qualitative benefits will take more time to measure.

**Action: Clerk/PVC (Marketing)**

- The Audit and Risk Committee will retain ongoing oversight of the main risks and how they are being managed. The Board's role for

the purposes of this update is to understand general progress and the benefits realisation piece.

*Agreed:* To receive the Project Transform: Benefits, KPIs and progress report.

**BG.23.129 Brand Strategy**

*Received:* Document BG/088/23

*Reported:* The Chair opened the item by noting that, while discussion and questions were welcomed, the item principally served to lay the foundations for next steps that would follow. Accordingly, the Chair would be writing to members within the next ten days to request input to a SWOT analysis of the University and for summary feedback on the brand strategy framework. The Chair will then consolidate the feedback, which will be an input for consideration at the strategy session in July.

The PVC Marketing then introduced the brand strategy, noting it sought to bring together the scale of the University's ambition. He advised that the University had recently made an excellent appointment in a new Director of Marketing, Communications and Student Recruitment, who would take up the post on 1 July and be instrumental in driving the strategy forward.

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

- The University is listening intently to stakeholder feedback and had commissioned an external consultancy firm to help better understand a wide range of stakeholder perceptions. The PVC Marketing had now received a 170-page insights report. Members noted it would be helpful to understand the highlights of this report and agreed a **summary of the key themes identified should be included as an input for July's strategy session.**

**Action: PVC Marketing**

- Members recognised the importance of students feeling a sense of belonging, which includes many elements – such as feeling at home, having pride in the campus, having support from the people around them etc. In terms of brand strategy development, members

noted that engendering student belonging should be core to the approach, with potential and current students knowing that Edge Hill is an outstanding place to live, learn, belong and achieve.

- Halo subjects have been identified for promotion, following a strategic decision that promoting certain groups of disciplines was in the University's best interests. While this means these areas, and the connectivity between them, will be advertised more aggressively, this will not disadvantage other subject areas.
- Members noted that the narrative in Appendix 2 included lots of positive ambitions but did not yet feel distinctively Edge Hill. They were advised that the University intended to bring out Edge Hill's distinctiveness in the final strategy and that governors would have the opportunity to input to this.
- The current strategy framework encompasses a significant amount of work, which will be a major undertaking to deliver. The Board questioned whether the University had sufficient staff resources in place to deliver this ambitious agenda. They were assured this would be the case when the new Director arrives, with activity prioritised appropriately.
- Given the anticipated level of activity, the **Board will need to understand what progress is being made**. This could be included in score card reporting on the University's Key Performance Indicators or in a discrete update on the brand strategy.

**Action: PVC (Marketing)**

Regarding next steps, the Chair confirmed that the main input to July's Board discussion would be a consolidation of members' feedback on:

- (i) SWOT analysis
- (ii) Purpose, vision and values of the University to be articulated in the Strategic Plan 2026-2030.

July's session will include a discussion on how to measure success and will aim to enable the PVC (Marketing) to develop the Brand Strategy. This will then be considered at January's away day to inform the development of the University's Strategic Plan 2026-2030.

*Agreed:* To approve the Brand Strategy Framework.

**SECTION B ITEMS**

**BG.23.130 Reserved Item [Exempt from Publication: Confidential]**

**BG.23.131 Academic Board (March 2024): Summary Report**

*Received:* Document BG/089/23

*Reported:* The Vice-Chancellor confirmed that the report was a matter of fact and there was no further information to add.

*Discussed:* Governors confirmed that the summary report gave sufficient assurance and no additional information was required.

*Agreed:* To receive the Academic Board (March 2024): Summary Report.

**BG.23.132 Late Mid-Year Reforecast**

*Received:* Document BG/090/23

*Reported:* The Vice-Chancellor introduced the report, highlighting that he is temporarily providing strategic leadership for Finance until the new Pro Vice-Chancellor (Resources) arrives in September. He emphasised that accounting forecasts involve judgment and can vary based on optimism levels. He noted that the Early Mid-Year Reforecast was optimistic, assuming no pension increase in the Teachers' Pension Scheme, maximised January recruitment, and increased professional development activity generating income. These assumptions did not materialise, leading to a revised anticipated surplus of £2.474m, down from the original £5.5m, despite better-than-expected retention adding £510,000.

In respect of the potential outturn as compared to the Late Mid-Year Reforecast, he highlighted the possible upside in staffing gap cost savings which may reach £3.2m by year-end due to tight control. He also noted the range of downside sensitivities that are still in play at this stage of the year. Given the inherent uncertainties in predicting a precise outcome, the Vice-Chancellor indicated that the year-end surplus could range from £1.8m to £4.4m. Nevertheless, he assured the Board that the Executive is diligently managing costs and is

confident the University will deliver a year-end surplus (in the order of that described), unlike many others in the sector.

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

- The Chair of Audit & Risk Committee and the Lead Governor: Finance recently met with the Vice-Chancellor for a scheduled update on the University's finances. Both governors expressed high levels of confidence in the Vice-Chancellor's financial leadership in the Deputy Vice-Chancellor's absence, noting this was echoed by the internal auditors in their feedback.
- The Chair of Audit & Risk Committee acknowledged that changes in a senior team can impact forecasting approaches due to differing perspectives on sensitivity analysis. He recorded his appreciation of the Vice-Chancellor's transparent update on the range of potential outcomes.
- Members expressed concern over the £2.045m increase in Facilities Management expenditure. A lengthy discussion ensued about the reasons for this, noting the paper indicated this increase was due to higher utility costs and Estates work but lacked detail on the balance between these factors. **Members requested a more detailed breakdown of the £2.045m to better understand the position.**

**Action: Vice-Chancellor.**

In bringing the item to a close, the Chair noted the Vice-Chancellor's assurance that the University would achieve a surplus and highlighted the vitally important projected cash generation of approximately £10m. He echoed the Vice-Chancellor's comments on the University's financial strength relative to others and commended the University for this.

Finally, the Chair noted that a Budget Scrutiny Panel would convene on 13 June to review the 2024/25 budget proposals. Insights from this evening's discussion had helped to identify key areas for further scrutiny. The Board will be updated on the Panel's findings in June when the budget is presented to the Board for approval.

*Agreed:* To receive the Late Mid-Year Reforecast.

**BG.23.133 Capital Projects Update**

*Received:* Document BG/091/23

***Reported:*** **[Exempt from publication – confidential]**

**BG.23.134 Board Effectiveness Action Plan**

*Received:* Document BG/092/23

*Reported:* The Chair introduced the Board Effectiveness Action Plan, drawing attention to the commitment to update members on progress periodically.

*Discussed:* Members were satisfied with the progress reported and had no questions.

*Agreed:* To receive the Board Effectiveness Action Plan.

**BG.23.135 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.23.136 Faculty of Education visit 23 April: Observations** (*Document BG/093/23*)

**BG.23.137 Board Diversity and Inclusion Statement** (*Document BG/094/23*)

**BG.23.138 Governance & Nominations Committee: Summary (March 2024)** (*Document BG/095/23*)

**BG.23.139 Remuneration Committee: Summary (March 2024)** (*Document BG/096/23*)

**BG.23.140 Students' Union Election Report** (*Document BG/097/23*)

**BG.23.141 Minutes of the Institutional Health, Safety & Environment  
Committee (April 2024) (*Document BG/098/23*)**

**BG.23.142 Date and time of next meeting**

The next meeting is scheduled for 17 June 2024.