

Board of Governors
Minutes of the Meeting held on 20 February 2019

Present:

Sylvia Hughes (Chair)
David Baker
Rafael Garcia-Krailing
Jeff Halliwell
Richard Horsley
Frank Jordan
Edward Lord
Gemma Lovegrove
Lee Machado
Martin Pettifor
Nick Pitts-Tucker
Nick Robertson
John Skelton

Apologies:

Sue Dutton, Mark Mulcahey, Nick Petford

In attendance:

Miriam Lakin (Clerk), Helen Scott, Dean of Education and Humanities (for item 30), Cathy Smith, Deputy Dean of Education and Humanities (for items 30 and 31), David Beere, IT Projects Director (for item 32)

To item 43:

Jane Bunce (Director of Student and Academic Services), from item 30.8, Mark Hall (Director of Finance), Deborah Mattock (Director of HR, Marketing and International Relations), Terry Neville (Chief Operating Officer), Ann Shelton-Mayes (Executive Dean of Student Experience)

26/19 Welcome, Apologies and Quorum

26.1 The Chair welcomed those present, noted apologies and confirmed that the meeting was quorate.

27/19 Declarations of Interest

27.1 No declarations of interest were received in addition to those held on file by the Clerk's Office.

28/19 Minutes of Previous Meeting

28.1 The Board approved the minutes and confidential minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2019 as a true record of that meeting, with a change to minute 5.10.

29/19 Action List and Matters Arising

29.1 The Board received and noted Paper A on actions arising from previous meetings. Additional comments were received on the following:

Minutes 29.2 and 29.3 are in the confidential section of these minutes.

29.4 Working Group on Board Development (Minute 19.3)

The group had met twice, and a number of ideas were emerging. These would be circulated for the input of Board members either at or before the March meeting, before formal recommendations were presented to the April meeting.

Helen Scott, Dean of Education and Humanities and Cathy Smith, Deputy Dean of Education and Humanities joined the meeting.

30/19 Faculty of Education and Humanities

30.1 The Board received and noted Paper B1, comprising key performance indicator data for all four faculties.

30.2 The Board received and noted Paper B2 and a presentation from the Dean of Education and Humanities. This covered strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for the Faculty, and the actions being taken to mitigate these, as well as its latest financial data and priorities.

30.3 The Dean advised the Board about the 'Educating Northamptonshire' conference which was to take place on 30 March. This would bring together 500 – 600 teachers from across the county and aimed to create a positive narrative about education in the county and share good practice, as well as allowing local teachers to see the new campus.

30.4 Members asked about opportunities for expansion and the Dean reported on two possible international opportunities which were being explored.

30.5 Members asked about competition and good practice in other institutions in online and distance learning. The Dean advised that there was competition and that the Faculty's strategy was to market by approaching institutions with which there were already strong relationships.

30.6 Members noted that there was a shortage of secondary teachers in Northamptonshire and asked whether the Faculty could offer secondary teacher training. The Dean reported that it had done so before, and was receiving enquiries from schools. However, a critical mass of around 15 trainees was needed to construct a viable cohort. This would require schools to work together to construct such a cohort, as the Faculty could not bid directly for student numbers.

30.7 Members asked about the strategic fit of courses in English and History and whether the University was best placed to help students on these courses develop the necessary critical thinking and employability skills. The Dean stated that the skills developed on such courses were valued by employers and that the Faculty worked with students to ensure they understood the relevance of what they were learning to employment. It was also noted that they were two lead subject areas in the REF, which had implications for international recruitment and for the perception of the University, both internally and externally. It was confirmed that Senate reviewed the strategic nature of the portfolio regularly.

Helen Scott left the meeting

31/19 Report from the Inclusive Student Experience Action Group

31.1 The Board received and noted Paper C, a report on the work of the Inclusive Student Experience Action Group (ISEG). The Board received a presentation from Cathy Smith in her role as Chair of the Group. She stated that the report set out progress against targets set by the University which were ambitious. She also reported on a specific project undertaken by the Group to close the attainment gap between students with protected characteristics and those without. The Group had taken two approaches to addressing areas where there was a persistent gap. The first was data analysis including developing understanding

of the prior learning journey of students by engaging with schools and colleges to understand the range of different qualifications now on offer. The second was developing an inclusive curriculum in which students see themselves, and much work had been undertaken at programme level.

31.2 Governors welcomed and supported the report, and the work which had underpinned it.

31.3 Members asked about good practice and good results achieved in other institutions. It was reported that many other universities had good practice, and several had had success in particular aspects of their work to support diverse student populations.

31.4 It was noted that in future all institutions would be expected by the OfS to complete action plans and to measure their effect, which meant that institutions would be made more accountable. The Chair of ISEG stated that she believed that institutions would be audited more and held more accountable.

31.5 Members asked if there was any timeline for the work outlined in the report. The Chair of ISEG stated that there was not. She noted that in the previous academic year certain programmes with poorer outcomes data by protected characteristics had received targeted intervention and had improved. However, different programmes needing intervention had emerged in the current year. Ideally, actions would be translated across the institution, removing the need for targeted intervention. The Chair of ISEG also noted that across the sector, the statistics had not changed greatly over the past 10 years.

31.6 The Board agreed that it took assurance from the paper that the University was making every effort to address differential attainment between different groups of students.

Cathy Smith left the meeting. David Beere, IT Projects Director, joined the meeting.

32/19 Information and Technology Update

32.1 The Board received and noted Paper E, an overview of the current IT projects and developments. Members stated that the report was reassuring and congratulated the IT Projects Director on the progress made.

32.2 Members asked for a fuller explanation of the nature of a problem which meant that the Citrix environment was being rebuilt. The IT Projects Director reported that this was due to some high-end apps which it had been decided to package internally. This meant that XMA were not aware of the requirements for them. The IT Projects Director agreed to send a full technical report to John Skelton. He confirmed that IT were now engaging directly with the suppliers to create a solution. However, this had an additional cost.

32.3 Members asked how staff and students were being communicated to about the issue, and whether the Citrix environment would remain accessible to students. The IT Projects Director confirmed that the University Management Team had discussed appropriate communications, and that the current environment which was working effectively would remain and would not be affected. Current users would retain their access. The high-end environment which did not function correctly at present was being redesigned. A lab had been created on the ground floor of the Senate building to mitigate this and ensure that users of the high-end environment had access to the apps they needed.

32.4 It was noted that student access to gaming had initially attracted negative comments on Twitter, however, it had been quickly and efficiently resolved, and the fact that students had been involved in this process had been interesting for them and had helped them to become advocates.

32.5 The IT Projects Director provided an update on cyber security and stated that the University remained under attack, although security had not been compromised. Members asked about the involvement of JISC, which provided

the JANET network. The IT Projects Director stated that JISC did not have a service for blocking a certain type of attack. He stated that as other universities were coming under the same type of attack, he would work with them on a joint representation to JISC.

32.6 The IT Projects Director confirmed that the main reason for attacks was for access to the systems, and that there was no single identifiable source of attacks. He confirmed that there were weekly checks of the internal networks for breaches, and a monthly vulnerability scan to ensure that outsiders could not get access.

32.7 Members asked about IT staff capability. The IT Projects Director reported that there had been much improvement. Purchasing four months of XMA hyper-care had given time to work on the skills of the team, which had therefore seen a significant shift in skills

32.8 Members asked if IT was still rated a red risk, and the Chief Operating Officer confirmed that it was.

32.9 Members asked about progress on staff training and development. It was reported that there had been significant development, for example induction for new staff included two sessions on technology, one tailored specifically to academic staff. It was hoped that this would leverage further conversations especially with line managers about behaviour and use of the systems.

33/19 Students' Union Compliance with Education Act 1994

33.1 The Board received and noted Paper D, a report on how the University and the Students' Union complied with the provisions of the 1994 Education Act with regards to students' unions.

34/19 Report from the Students' Union

34.1 The Board received and noted Paper N, comprising the annual accounts of the Students' Union for 2017-18, and an update on Students' Union's strategy.

34.2 Members asked about the loss made on bars and entertainments. The President of the SU reported that the SU had adapted its strategy to respond to the changing student demographic, and the figure for 2017-18 reflected the previous approach. There had been some turnover of staff to ensure that there was more commercial focus. However, there was also less of a drinking culture amongst the student body. In addition, opening the Platform venue late, part way through an academic year had contributed to the loss.

34.3 The President of the SU confirmed that the position shown in the latest SU accounts was more promising. There was good trade in the Platform, more commercially focused management, and opportunities to make income from the space.

34.4 Members commented that it was not desirable for the University, as a charity, to subsidise the SU's commercial business on a long-term basis. From the University's perspective it was reported that the University allowed a subsidy on SU provision at the Avenue Campus in order to ensure that there was a service for the students on that site. The University also subsidised its own catering provision for students.

34.5 Members asked about the SU's strategic plan and the likelihood that this would continue to be delivered following SU sabbatical officer elections. It was reported that there had been wide consultation amongst the student body in the development of the strategic plan which increased the likelihood that incoming sabbatical officers would support it. The strategic plan also created an effective business model for the SU for which there was support.

34.6 It was noted that a venue such as the Platform created employment for students which was another way in which it added value that was not purely

commercial. It was also a safe environment for student entertainment, which had been recognised through multiple awards.

34.7 Members noted a reference to forming a separate company and advised that there was thorough consideration of the implications of this.

34.8 The Board received a presentation from the President of the SU about the SU's strategic plan. This included an overview of the research which underpinned the creation of the plan, and the identification of segments of the student population to which communications and events could be tailored.

34.9 The impact of the Student Voice Working Group was noted. This allowed student needs and feedback to be identified quickly and resolved before they escalated.

34.10 In terms of trading, it was noted that provision at the Avenue campus was run on a cost basis to provide a service for the students on that campus. There were opportunities to leverage the use of the Platform to support strategic aims.

34.11 The Board congratulated the President and his team, including the COO of the SU, for the excellent work they were doing.

35/19 Budget Setting for 2019-20

35.1 The Board received and approved Paper O, which set out the timetable for the budget setting exercise for 2019-20.

Minutes 35.2 to 35.7 are in the confidential section of these minutes.

35.8 Members supported the creation of a sub group of the Board to consider finance and especially the forward forecast. It was suggested that ending the Treasury Committee in its current form, but retaining its membership would make use of the skills of those governors who were experts. It was also suggested that additional external members could be added to provide

expertise. It was agreed that the group would form along the same lines as the former Project Assurance Committee in order to monitor, and to function as a critical friend during the project delivery. It was agreed that there was no intention for the group to exist permanently, and that it was essential for the whole Board to remain fully aware of the University's financial position.

35.9 The Clerk agreed to prepare proposed terms of reference for discussion at the next meeting. The Treasury Committee meeting planned for 10 April would be held for the new group.

Action: Clerk

36/19 Management Accounts

36.1 The Board received and noted Paper F, the latest management accounts.

Minutes 36.2 to 36.4 are in the confidential section of these minutes.

36.5 Members suggested that a normalised Profit and Loss account should be produced which removed the additional one-off costs incurred in the current year. This would allow the underlying position to be monitored. It was agreed that this would be produced as part of the budget plan for 2019-20.

Action: Director of Finance

Jeff Halliwell left the meeting.

37/19 Independent TEF Review

37.1 The Board received and noted Paper G, the University's response to an independent review of the Teaching Excellence Framework. The Executive Dean of Student Experience stated that the general view conveyed in the University's

response was that TEF supported the University's own processes to drive up quality, but was burdensome, and that a subject level TEF had little benefit.

37.2 Members commented that whilst the response addressed the questions, it could be made more robust and focused. The Executive Dean of Student Experience agreed to update the response prior to its submission.

Action: Executive Dean of Student Experience

37.3 It was reported that it was very unlikely that the University would retain its TEF Gold rating. The Academic Assurance Committee was due to look at this in more detail at its meeting on 20 March. It was due to a change in the metrics, for example employability had been emphasised with no provision for geographical benchmarking. Learning resources and student voice had been included and some of the University's largest academic areas performed less well in these measures.

38/19 2017/18 TRAC for Teaching Compliance

38.1 The Board received Paper H, the 2017/18 TRAC for Teaching return. The Board confirmed compliance with the TRAC for Teaching requirements.

39/19 Research Integrity Statement

39.1 The Board received Paper I and noted the statement on research integrity which it contained.

40/19 Annual Review of Financial Regulations

40.1 The Board received Paper J, updated financial regulations following an annual review.

40.2 It was confirmed that the updated Financial Regulations referred to an updated policy on the acceptance of gifts and hospitality which was not ready

for approval at the current meeting, and would be brought to the Board for approval in due course.

40.3 The Board approved the updated financial regulations as set out in Paper J.

41/19 UCAS Applications and Decisions

41.1 The Board received and noted Paper L which set out the latest statistics on applications through UCAS and the decisions of applicants.

42/19 Update on Board Membership and Recruitment of Independent Members

42.1 The Chair reported that as Sara Goodwin's work commitments no longer allowed her to attend Board meetings, she had decided to step down from her independent membership of the Board. As work commitments had meant that she had been unable to engage consistently during the 2018/19 academic year, the end of Sara Goodwin's first term of office would be recorded as July 2018. Two additional terms of office would be available to her in future, subject to a position being open and an appropriate fit of skills.

42.2 The Board thanked Sara Goodwin for her contributions and work over the past three years and wished her every success for the future.

42.3 The Chair and Chair of the Audit Committee proposed that, in order to retain Sara Goodwin's skills and ensure that she could remain involved, she was added as an external member of the Audit Committee. Sara Goodwin had confirmed that she was willing to serve in this role. The Board supported this proposal and agreed to amend the terms of reference of the Audit Committee to include one further external member.

Action: Clerk

42.4 A recruitment exercise for new independent members was ongoing. Interviews with prospective candidates were planned for 7 March.

43/19 Any Other Business

43.1 Westminster Higher Education Forum Seminar on Priorities for Student Mental Health

The Chair of the Board and Gemma Lovegrove had attended this event. Amongst the key points were creating a sense of belonging and a feeling of being part of community, and tackling imposter syndrome. It had been confirmed that statistically there was no difference between the suicide rate amongst students and those of the same age not at university. However, better data was required. The University's student mental health and wellbeing provision appeared to be robust in that much of what was discussed at the Forum was already offered, however, better signposting was needed and there was a role for the SU in this.

Minute 43.2 is in the confidential section of these minutes.

43.3 Business Lectures

Nick Robertson reported that on the 19 March the first of a series of lectures organised between the University and the High Sheriff would take place. Formal invitations would be issued shortly. In particular, the aim was to invite those at Chief Executive and Chair level in local businesses with the aim of creating a forum for local businesses. The lecture would be delivered by Timothy Henry, author of Conscious Capitalism.

43.4 Diamond Research Awards

It was reported that the first Diamond Research Awards to celebrate research excellence in the University had taken place on 18 February. The event had also launched 'Pure', the University's new research information system.

43.5 Waterside Campus Awards

The Waterside Campus had been shortlisted for two Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors East Midlands awards. It had also been shortlisted for three AUDE (Association of University Directors of Estates) Awards.

Jane Bunce, Mark Hall, Terry Neville, Ann Shelton-Mayes and Deborah Mattock left the meeting.

44/19 Minutes Confidential to the Board of its Meeting on 23 January 2019

44.1 The Board approved the minutes confidential to the Board of its meeting on 23 January 2019 as a true record of that meeting.

45/19 Terms of Reference for Search Committee

45.1 The Board approved Paper M, the Terms of Reference for a Search Committee.

46/19 Confirmation of Availability of Papers

46.1 The following papers were confirmed as confidential to the meeting:

Paper B1 – Faculty Data Sheets

Paper C – Inclusive Student Experience Action Group Report

Paper E – IT Update

Paper L – UCAS Applications and Decisions

Paper O – Timetable for Budget Setting for 2019/20

47/19 Dates of Forthcoming Meetings

47.1 Court – 13 March 2019 at 3pm

Academic Assurance Committee – 20 March 2019

Board of Governors – 20 March 2019

Nominations Committee – 20 March 2019

Risk Workshop – 3 April 2019

Audit Committee – 3 April 2019