

University of Central Lancashire

UNRESERVED Minutes of the Board Meeting Held on 11 April 2024 at 5.00pm via video-conference

Present:

Sue Ion (Chair)

Graham Baldwin
Jim Carter
Luke Fitzgerald
Ridwanah Gurjee
Lesley Lloyd
Ruth Lowry

Anne McCarthy
Lorraine Norris
Fiona Rayment
Khalil Rehman
Lindsay Robinson
Lis Smith

Also in attendance:

Lisa Brooks (Governance and Compliance Manager)
George Charles (Chief Finance Officer)
Ruth Connor (Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Operations))
Ian Fisher (University Secretary and General Counsel and Clerk to the Board)
Andrew Ireland (Pro Vice-Chancellor (Students & Teaching)) for items UB1203 and UB1204
Carolyn Johnson (Executive Officer to the Vice-Chancellor)
Ken Lee (Chief People Officer)

UB1198. Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed all present including the Vice-Chancellor's Group (VCG) contingent who were currently in Cyprus. Given that the meeting was now taking place remotely via Teams, the planned visit to the School of Veterinary Medicine would be re-scheduled. In the meantime, colleagues were invited to propose any activities of interest that could be arranged, either as a singular event or linked to a Board meeting.

Apologies had been received from Jon Baldwin, Richard Frediani and Richard Hext.

UB1199. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest in addition to those already declared in the register.

UB1200. Chair's Announcements

The Chair made the following announcements:

- (i) During a recent encounter with the Chief Scientist at Rolls Royce, he had commended the UCLan Motor Sports team as excellent ambassadors for the University.
- (ii) Similarly, Henri Murison, Chief Executive of the Northern Powerhouse, had commended UCLan's applied research portfolio and the EIC (Engineering Innovation Centre) facility, citing these as factors in the decision to move the AMRC (Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre) to Salmesbury.
- (iii) A letter had been received from the Office for Students (OfS) highlighting the importance of having effective arrangements in place to support any student who experienced harassment, including in relation to free speech. The Chair recommended that this should be addressed within the Governance Effectiveness Review (GER).

Finally, the Chair congratulated Luke Fitzgerald upon his re-election as President of the Students' Union, noting that his experience in representing the student voice was highly valued by the Board.

UB1201. Reserved and Unreserved Minutes of the University Board Meeting held on 14 February 2024

The Reserved Minutes of the meeting held on 14 February 2024 were agreed as a true record, to be signed by the Chair. The Unreserved Minutes were approved, subject to an amendment to Minute UB1196 to highlight the importance of support for students whose circumstances were such that they may be forced into sex work.

UB1202. Matters Arising

The Chair reported that the majority of matters were addressed within the Vice-Chancellor's report. The following matters arising were noted from the Action Log:

- (i) The GER was underway with input from an independent, external consultant. A report would be presented to the Governance, Risk and Nominations Committee and the Board in due course (Item UB1193).
- (ii) A process to recruit new Board members was underway, with the involvement of specialist consultants to assist in enhancing the diversity of the Board membership (Item UB1194).
- (iii) The Interpath reports on UCLan Cyprus and the Safeguarding Governors' Masterclass slide deck had been uploaded to the Teams site (Item UB1194).
- (iv) Members' suggestions that students' voluntary work and the responsible use of social media be promoted, were being taken forward by the relevant Communications and Student Services Teams (Item UB1196).

UB1203. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report 2022/23

Professor Andrew Ireland joined the meeting for items UB1203 and UB1204.

The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Students & Teaching) presented the Annual Report on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) covering the academic year 2022/23. A copy of the report is set out in the Minute Book.

In briefly summarising the report, Professor Ireland highlighted the following:

(i) Belonging at UCLan

Good progress had been made in implementing the 'Belonging at UCLan' Strategy which articulated the University's ambition to be a fairer, more diverse and inclusive organisation, based on 4 pillars: People Profile; Learner Outcomes; Sense of Belonging; and EDI Research.

(ii) Key Achievements

The report showcased a wide range of events and achievements in 2022/23 relating to the University's commitments to: create a more disability inclusive community; advance gender equality; raise awareness of LGBT+ inclusion; embed an anti-racist approach; and provide a place of safety and solidarity for people seeking sanctuary.

(iii) EDI Scorecard Data

An update on the EDI score-card metrics for staff and students demonstrated a positive trajectory. Data relating to Learner Outcomes which was linked to HESA would not be available until May 2024 when action plans would be developed. In the meantime, the Access and Participation Plan was being re-worked to include interventions to address gaps in learner outcomes.

(iv) Update on Diversity Statistics

The diversity profile for UK domicile students showed that learning and mental health related disabilities continued to predominate. Whilst female students continued to make up two thirds of the population with a slight decrease in the proportion of male students, the diversity profile across all other areas had increased, including age, ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation. The statistics for staff indicated an increase in the proportion of staff declining to disclose a disability. This area required further work to ensure colleagues received appropriate support in the workplace.

Mrs Norris confirmed that she had been consulted in the preparation of the report in her role as Board EDI Lead. She commended the focus and reach of the initiatives and the level of commitment demonstrated across all areas of the University.

In response to a suggestion by Dr Gurjee, Professor Ireland stated that work with the People Team was ongoing to co-ordinate existing support mechanisms for staff, such as stress risk assessments and referrals to occupational health and counselling, to create a comprehensive package of support. Dr Smith urged that it was important to think creatively about how best to support for staff, particularly with learning disabilities such as Neurodiversity and ensure that all staff were aware of this.

With reference to the diversity profile of students by sex and the lower proportion of male students, Mr Fitzgerald reported that the Students' Union had implemented several campaigns to support male students, especially with their mental health.

Whilst acknowledging the ongoing work to achieve the Race Equality Chartermark (REC), Mr Rehman enquired whether there was any analysis of the EDI profile of staff across different employment bands, with a view to promoting equity in progression opportunities and creating a pipeline of talent. Professor Ireland responded that this work was in progress, linked to the REC action plan which was on schedule for submission in November. There had been a good level of engagement with staff and students through the recent survey and focus groups. Activities were underway relating to eight workstreams, with a view to generating smart action plans. It was also suggested that an analysis be carried out of the extent to which the EDI characteristics of the UCLan population reflected the geographical pool of student and staff recruitment.

Noting the quality of the data, Dr Smith recommended that EDI issues be considered at an early stage in the current cost reduction exercise, in seeking to ensure that staff with diverse and complex needs were not unduly affected. Mr Lee recognised the need to be proactive and confirmed that an Equality Impact Assessment was in progress to ensure the process was conducted equitably.

The Chair thanked Professor Ireland and colleagues for the comprehensive report, which was indicative of continuous improvement year on year.

Resolved: that the draft Annual Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Report be approved for design and publication.

UB1204. Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Update

Professor Ireland delivered a comprehensive presentation on the work that was underway to support student mental health and wellbeing as part of a whole University approach. A copy of the slide deck is included the Minute Book.

During his detailed presentation which included sensitive subject matter, Professor Ireland highlighted the following key points:

- (i) As part of the framework for the Mental Health Task Force, the Government was encouraging HE providers to take ownership of student mental health, adopt relevant sector guidance and support the recent review of student suicides, with the suggestion of OfS regulation if improvements were not made in this area.
- (ii) Extensive work was ongoing at UCLan to deter and address incidents of sexual violence, domestic abuse and harassment under the auspices of the cross-University SVDAH working group, in anticipation of the proposed new OfS condition. This included work to ensure institutional readiness for the new Freedom of Speech legislation.

- (iii) There were lessons to learn from recent cases outside UCLan about the importance of ensuring appropriate and timely support and adjustments for disabled students, including the need for professional curiosity, early intervention, compassionate communications and institutional connectivity.
- (iv) A new governance structure had been established to support a whole University approach and create accountability for student support, comprising five specialist working groups and lines of report to the Academic and University Boards.
- (v) Strategic progress was being made in relation to partnership working with healthcare professionals, adopting the Disabled Student Commitment and leading the sector in suicide prevention and postvention, including informing best practice for the HE Mental Health Taskforce in this area.
- (vi) The Student Support Characteristics showed a positive level of engagement amongst black students and that UCLan had seen an increase in students with a mental health condition, currently at 6.2% compared to the sector's 5%.
- (vii) The student engagement data evidenced extensive activity and action, where the majority of cases were triaged on the day of referral. The statistics revealed that students who engaged with support had higher continuation rates and better outcomes than those with no support referral.
- (viii) The next steps were designed to embed an integrated student support system across the whole institution based on best practice and lessons learned, with a focus on training and support for all staff including Course Leaders in getting to know their students and exercising professional curiosity.

Dr Ion enquired about the mechanisms to identify and intervene where mental health issues did not manifest at the outset but at a later point in the student journey. Professor Ireland affirmed that the key message for all staff was to be aware of accountability and to refer to specialist services. There were teams of Achievement Coaches working closely with Student Services to refer students for support, and triage arrangements to identify students in need of urgent support.

Mr Rehman observed that it was important to be cognisant of intersectionality in relation to Neurodiversity and the potential for mental health issues to develop in-year. Professor Ireland responded that dashboards enabled the interrogation of data at course and school level and the provision of targeted support as part of the early intervention model. In her role as a Staff Governor, Ms Robinson explained how the dashboards were used in practice to enable an understanding of the underlying data and how issues might escalate. The top reasons for referral for support were stress and anxiety and the SMHW Committee was looking at how to manage that.

In response to Mrs Lloyd's enquiry about support for staff and external connectivity, Professor Ireland confirmed that the work of Student Services was aligned and co-ordinated with the People Team. There was extensive connection with external specialist agencies, particularly in relation to the Prevent agenda. Dr Gurjee added that work with the People Team was also important to support staff who were affected by student mental health issues.

Professor Ireland agreed with Mrs Lloyd's observation about the difficulties of identifying suicidal ideation in others, and explained that there were measures in place, including suicide awareness and prevention training for students and staff and peer support.

Regarding the reasons why there was a higher proportion of students with a mental health condition at UCLan (6.2%) than elsewhere in the sector (5%), Professor Ireland explained that this was due in part to UCLan's student demographic and widening participation agenda, and also a result of the University's holistic approach which helped students to come forward and request support.

Miss McCarthy commended the excellent work on student support, and enquired how this was integrated into the University's wider strategy, where students might spend fewer days on campus, meaning that it was harder to stay connected, spot signs and intervene. Professor Ireland responded that Student Support colleagues were involved in UCLan Next to ensure that student support was wrapped around those learners, with different support packages available.

Dr Smith added that university provided a safe space for students and staff in terms of their emotional and financial wellbeing, notwithstanding the mode of delivery. Addressing the complex needs of people was an important part of the agenda for changing lives, alongside the provision of training and education. She commended the teams for providing high quality support with limited resource and suggested that this should be recognised more formally by government.

Mrs Lowry added that in her role as Board Safeguarding Champion, she was aware of an excellent infrastructure of mandatory staff training covering a range of issues, which she commended to the Board.

The Chair thanked Professor Ireland for his comprehensive presentation and highlighted the importance and complexity of this work, which was rising up the OfS agenda.

Resolved: that the work to support student mental health and wellbeing as part of a whole University approach to student support be noted.

UB1205. Reserved Minute - Text Redacted

UB1206. Reserved Minute - Text Redacted

UB1207. Reserved Minute - Text Redacted

UB1208. Reserved Minute - Text Redacted

UB1209. Pulse Survey

It was agreed to defer this item to a future meeting.

UB1210. Students' Union Report

The President of the Students' Union presented a report giving an update on key initiatives and progress made by the Students' Union on current student issues. A copy of the report is set out in the Minute Book.

In briefly summarising the report, Mr Fitzgerald highlighted the following:

- (i) There had been a 300% increase in staff and student nominations for the Golden Rose and ACEs Awards, which demonstrated how students valued key staff.
- (ii) A review of the articles and bye-laws had been initiated, with the aim of fostering greater innovation and clarity in the structure and operation of the organisation.
- (iii) A roundtable meeting with colleagues from Academic Registry had been helpful in conveying students' concerns about the operation of the Mitigating Circumstances procedure.
- (iv) Work was ongoing to support students through the cost-of-living crisis, including the provision of free food during the exam period as part of the Study Break initiative.

Members welcomed the report which provided a good understanding of the issues affecting students and the actions being taken by the Students' Union. It was reassuring to note that the student voice was being listened to in relation to Mitigating Circumstances.

UB1211. Committee Chair's/Board Lead Updates

Audit Committee - 6 March 2024

Mrs Lowry reported on the substantive items considered at the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 6 March 2024, as follows:

- (i) Khalil Rehman had been welcomed as a new member, which would improve the resilience of the Committee.
- (ii) The arrangements for the provision of internal and external audit services had been considered, given that the current contracts (for RSMUK and KPMG) were due to expire in July 2024. Regarding internal audit, it was agreed to test the market in the normal way through a tender process. Regarding external audit, the re-appointment of KPMG was endorsed, on the basis that the tenure and terms for testing and extending the contract, be deferred to the CFO.
- (iii) Four recently completed audit assignments had all resulted in 'substantial assurance' being given as the auditors were satisfied that rigorous controls were in place. This was an excellent set of results.
- (iv) It had been agreed that the subsidiary company audit exemption under the Companies Act be applied to Centralan Holdings Limited and UCLan

Community Dentists Limited for 2023/24, on the basis that assurances would be provided from other sources including the main audit.

- (v) It had been agreed that the Policy Update prepared by the University's Strategic Data and Policy Insight Team be uploaded to the Teams site each fortnight for Board members' information.

Reserved Minute - Text Redacted

Honorary Awards Committee - 11 April 2024

Professor Baldwin reported that, at its earlier meeting on 11 April 2024, the Honorary Awards Committee had approved nine high quality nominations for honorary awards, with a good balance in terms of gender and a breadth of experience.

Academic Board - 27 March 2024

Mrs Lowry reported that, having attended the meeting of the Academic Board on 27 March 2024, she and Mr J Baldwin were able to give assurances that the Academic Board and its Sub-committees were fulfilling their key responsibilities in terms of academic governance in line with their terms of reference. A written summary of the issues discussed at the meeting had been circulated to members of the Board.

UB1212. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

UB1213. Date and Time of the Next Meeting

The next meeting would take place on 16-17 May 2024 at the Belsfield Hotel, Bowness-on-Windermere, Cumbria, LA23 3EL.

Ian Fisher
Clerk to the Board