

**University of Central Lancashire**

**Unreserved Minutes of the Board Meeting Held on 27 June 2024 at 5.00pm in the Adelphi Conference Room, Preston Campus**

**Present:**

Sue Ion (Chair)

Graham Baldwin

Jon Baldwin

Jim Carter

Luke Fitzgerald

Richard Frediani

Ridwanah Gurjee

Lesley Lloyd (until item UB1236)

Ruth Lowry

Anne McCarthy

Lorraine Norris

Khalil Rehman

Fiona Rayment

Lis Smith\*

**Also in attendance:**

Lisa Brooks (Governance and Compliance Manager)

George Charles (Chief Finance Officer)

Ian Fisher (University Secretary and General Counsel/Clerk to the Board)

Andrew Ireland (Pro Vice-Chancellor (Students and Teaching)) for item 11

Carolyn Johnson (Executive Officer to the Vice-Chancellor)

Ken Lee (Chief People Officer)

\*Via videoconference

**UB1229. Welcome and Apologies**

The Chair welcomed all present.

Apologies for absence had been received from Richard Hext and Lindsay Robinson in their role as Board members, and from Ruth Connor in her role as Deputy Vice-Chancellor.

**UB1230. Declaration of Interests**

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

**UB1231. Chair's Announcements**

The Chair reported that:

- (i) the Board had enjoyed an impressive tour of the School of Veterinary Medicine led by an inspirational Dean of School. It was particularly pleasing to hear the commitment to providing opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds to study Veterinary Medicine; and
- (ii) it was proposed to appoint Dr Fiona Rayment as an Independent member of the Audit Committee with immediate effect, given her extensive experience in this area.

**Resolved:** That Dr Fiona Rayment be appointed as a member of the Audit Committee with immediate effect.

**UB1232. Reserved and Unreserved Minutes of the University Board Meeting held on 16 May 2024**

The Reserved and Unreserved Minutes of the previous meeting held on 16 May 2024 were agreed as a true record, subject to the deletion of the word 'this' in Minute UB1222, to be signed by the Chair thereafter.

**UB1233. Matters Arising**

The Chair reported that the majority of matters were addressed within the Vice-Chancellor's report or elsewhere on the agenda. The following matters arising were highlighted:

- (i) Reserved Minute - Text Redacted
- (ii) Following the presentation on the Cyber Security Review at the last meeting, Mr Rehman had volunteered to provide strategic level support to the Executive Director of IT and Digital Services and assurance to the Board that the recommendations arising from the Review were being progressed (Minute UB1226).

**Resolved:** That Mr Rehman be appointed as Board Lead for IT and Digital Services issues.

- (iii) Following the presentation on the Estates Strategy and Masterplan at the last meeting, Mr Carter had volunteered to provide strategic level support to the Director of Estates and Campus Services, in taking forward the proposed actions and keeping the Board informed accordingly (Minute UB1227).

**Resolved:** That Mr Carter be appointed as Board Lead for Estates and Campus services issues.

**UB1234. Reserved Minute - Text Redacted**

**UB1235. Reserved Minute - Text Redacted**

## **UB1236. Reserved Minute - Text Redacted**

## **UB1237. Fees and Awards Proposals 2025/26**

A paper was received setting out proposals for 2025/26, comprising three parts as follows:

- Part 1: Tuition Fees - UK and International fee proposals (Taught and Research)
- Part 2: Awards - UK and International scholarship and bursaries proposals
- Part 3: Tuition Fee Policy 2024/25 and 2025/26.

A copy of the paper is included in the Minute Book.

Mr Charles reported that the Tuition Fee Policy (Part 3) had been subject to a comprehensive review in the current annual cycle, including a benchmarking exercise, which concluded that the University's Policy was in line with other institutions. The proposed changes were, therefore, minor and incremental.

The proposals for tuition fees and awards (Parts 1 and 2) had been developed with due regard for the external context and the University's market position and had been approved by the Fees Governance Group, the Vice-Chancellor's Group and by the Resources Committee at its meeting on 5 June 2024.

The Chair of the Resources Committee, Mr J Baldwin, confirmed that the Executive Director of Academic Registry and Recruitment had attended the meeting of the Resources Committee to present the rationale for the proposal to increase the undergraduate and postgraduate international tuition fees by 5% and 5.9% respectively. There had been a good discussion around market share and price sensitivity and whether a lower fee might lead to a higher volume of students. Overall, the Committee had been satisfied that the tuition fee proposals were informed by a thorough analysis and were underpinned by a package of bursaries and scholarships. It was, therefore, agreed to recommend the package of fees and awards to the Board for approval.

In response to a question by Mr Rehman about the effect of the foreign exchange rates, Mr Charles confirmed there had been a discussion about the elasticity of the fees and undertook to check the rates accordingly.

The Chair affirmed that the Resources Committee had been assured by the confidence and knowledge displayed by the Executive Director of Academic Registry and Recruitment.

**Resolved:** That the following be approved based on the recommendation by the Resources Committee:

- (i) the proposed 2025/26 Fees and Awards; and
- (ii) the Tuition Fee Policy 2024/25 and 2025/26.

## **UB1238. Research Integrity Annual Statement 2023/24**

The Vice-Chancellor presented the Research Integrity Annual Statement 2023/24 on behalf of Professor StJohn Crean, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Enterprise), a copy of which is set out in the Minute Book.

Professor Baldwin explained that the University was required to prepare and publish a statement outlining its commitment to Research Integrity, including:

- (i) A summary of actions to support and strengthen the understanding and application of research integrity issues.
- (ii) A statement giving assurance that the University's procedures for dealing with allegations of research misconduct were transparent, timely, robust and fair.
- (iii) A statement on any formal investigations of research misconduct during the period and what lessons had been learned to avoid a recurrence.
- (iv) A statement on how an environment was created to enable staff, researchers and students to feel comfortable to report instances of research misconduct.

The Statement covering the period from September 2023 to August 2024 demonstrated how the University complied with the terms of the Concordat and had been approved the Research, Knowledge Exchange and Ethics Committee. Importantly, there had been no incidents of research misconduct during the period.

The Chair recorded thanks to Professor Crean for preparing the Statement.

**Resolved:** That the Research Integrity Annual Statement 2023/24 be approved for publication on the University's external webpages and submission to the Research Integrity Secretariat.

## **UB1239. Access and Participation Plan**

Professor Andrew Ireland, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Students and Teaching) joined the meeting.

Professor Ireland presented the proposed new draft Access and Participation Plan (the Plan) which had been prepared in line with the latest guidance published by the Office for Students (OfS), being one of the Conditions of Registration. A copy of the Plan is set out in the Minute Book.

Professor Ireland reported that the purpose of the Plan, which had been prepared in collaboration with the Students' Union, was to document how the University would improve equality of opportunity for under-represented groups to access, succeed in and progress from higher education. The Plan covered a four-year period and was

underpinned by an Equality of Opportunity Risk Register outlining 12 risks. The data had been used to assess performance and identify 7 targets across the student lifecycle relating to Access (2), Success (4) and Progression (1), each of which had a corresponding intervention strategy.

The actions within the Plan corresponded closely with the University's ongoing work towards achieving the Race Equality and Mental Health Charters, to ensure a unified approach within an overarching evaluation framework.

In thanking Professor Ireland for his presentation, the Chair stated that it was important for the Board to understand that the University was working hard to address access and participation, whilst noting the extent of the documentation and regulatory obligations.

Dr Rayment enquired how assurance could be taken that the best practice was being implemented back into the University. Professor Ireland responded that the evaluation framework was a new entity being overseen by the Centre for Collaborative Learning (CCL), with a remit to uncover, record and embed good practice.

In response to an enquiry about the risks posed by the awarding gap between Black and White students, Professor Ireland confirmed that this was driven by the data and did not, therefore, relate to other minoritised groups.

Whilst acknowledging the extensive evidence base underpinning the Plan, Dr Smith recommended that practical elements of best practice at other Universities also be examined, and that it was important to maintain focus on the University's learner base when implementing curriculum transformation, so as not to exacerbate the gaps.

Professor Ireland gave assurances that best practice drawn from other institutions had helped to improve outcomes for disadvantaged students. The proposed new block delivery was informed by sound pedagogy and an impact assessment would be carried out to ensure there were no unintended detrimental effects.

Mr J Baldwin acknowledged that it was an impressive and extensive document produced at a time when the sector was experiencing significant pressure which raised questions about the extent of the regulatory burden.

Discussion ensued about the potential effects of a change in government which may result in a review of the operation of the OfS. It was hoped that this might result in a more positive narrative around HE with a likely increase in demands in different areas which the University was well placed to meet, such as growth and productivity, whilst access and participation was likely to remain high on the agenda.

Mr Fitzgerald confirmed that the Students' Union was supportive of the Plan and the priorities outlined therein.

In acknowledging the alignment with the Students' Union, the Chair thanked Professor Ireland for an excellent piece of work.

**Resolved:** That the Access and Participation Plan and the performance described therein, be noted.

#### **UB1240. Students' Union Report**

The President of the Students' Union presented the regular report giving an update on key initiatives being progressed by the Students' Union. A copy of the report is set out in the Minute Book.

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

- (i) The Board of Trustees had ratified a new policy whereby a more ethical, sustainable local provider would be sourced for the Union Café, with the aim of extending this principle to other outlets and services provided by the Students' Union.
- (ii) The Students' Union had been working closely with the EDI Team to create a positive culture wherein microaggressions were eliminated to improve students' experiences in the future. This would form the basis of a new campaign in November 2024.
- (iii) The Students' Union was working with the Director of EDI with a view to creating more accessible prayer spaces for students who were unable to reach the Oasis Centre between classes and making slow but tangible progress.

The Board urged the VCG to prioritise the creation of prayer spaces in other University buildings in addition to the Oasis Centre. Mr Rehman volunteered to provide details of compact prayer spaces with wash facilities funded by the NHS for the University to consider.

Ms Gurjee gave assurances that student feedback via Unitu had been acted upon whereby the Estates Team had created prayer spaces in the Harrington Building. There was also a prayer room with wash facilities at the Newtown Mill.

**Resolved:** That the Students' Union Update Report be noted.

#### **UB1241. Academic Board Annual Assurance Report**

The University Secretary reported that the Academic Board Annual Assurance Report had been omitted from the original circulation list in error.

The purpose of the Report was to provide assurance to the University Board that the Academic Board had fulfilled the key responsibilities delegated to it through the Articles of Government and that there was effective academic governance in place.

In summary, the responsibilities of the Academic Board included:

- (i) effective implementation of the University's academic strategies;
- (ii) upholding the quality and standards of teaching for all awards; and
- (iii) considering information on major national and regional developments.

It was, therefore, proposed to circulate the Report for members to consider and confirm as:

- (i) an accurate reflection of the business conducted through the academic governance structure during 2022/23; and
- (ii) providing appropriate assurance to the University Board that the Academic Board and its Sub-committees had fulfilled their key delegated responsibilities.

In the meantime, Mr J Baldwin and Mrs Lowry who had attended the latest meeting of Academic Board in their role as Board Leads for academic assurance, would provide an update under Item 14.

**Resolved:** That the Academic Board Annual Assurance Report be circulated to members of the University Board to be considered and approved in accordance with the Written Resolution Procedure.

## **UB1242. Committee Chair's Updates**

### **Audit Committee - 4 June 2024**

Mrs Lowry reported on the substantive items considered at the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 4 June 2024 as follows:

- (i) the Committee had considered a progress report on four internal audit assignments that were underway and one which had been completed, and ongoing work to resolve outstanding management actions by year end.
- (ii) the External Audit Plan and Strategy setting out the approach to the consolidated financial statements for the year ending 31 July 2024 was considered, together with a benchmarking report and sector update.

The University Secretary reported that three organisations had been invited to submit proposals for the provision of internal audit services, upon expiry of the current contract in July 2024. A Panel comprising members of the Audit Committee had been convened to interview the prospective providers and make recommendations.

Given the short timeframe, the Board agreed to defer to the Panel's judgment in the appointment of internal audit services.

The Chair thanked Mrs Lowry for her report, confirming that a written summary of the meeting had been circulated and posted to the Teams site.

### **Resources Committee - 5 June 2024**

Mr J Baldwin reported that the majority of substantive items considered at the meeting of the Resources Committee on 5 June 2024 had been discussed earlier in the agenda, in particular, the international update and Cyprus, fees and awards, Training 2000 Ltd and the draft budget.

Whilst there had been some tension and challenge during the budget discussions, this had been positive and strengthened the operation of the Committee and the University.

In addition to the matters previously discussed, the Committee had received an update from the IP and Commercialisation Panel, approved minor changes to the Treasury Management Strategy and Policy and noted the Ethical Investment Policy.

Professor Baldwin acknowledged that the discussion had been helpful in terms of shaping the VCG's thinking and, overall, it had been a positive process.

### **Academic Board - 19 June 2024**

Mr J Baldwin and Mrs Lowry provided an update following attendance at the meeting of the Academic Board held on 19 June 2024 in their roles as Board Leads for academic assurance.

Mrs Lowry confirmed that the meeting had been well organised with a good level of engagement. From a governance perspective, there was evidence effective alignment between the business of the Academic and University Boards.

Mr J Baldwin added that there had been two substantive items of business, as follows:

- (i) the Director of Academic Quality and Enhancement had delivered a presentation on proposed changes to the Academic Regulations, which were intended to support student progression and achievement, and which had generated good discussion.
- (ii) the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Students and Teaching) had delivered a presentation on Project 'Next' which had involved good discussion, whilst suggesting that further work was required to secure 'buy in' from the academic community.

Professor Baldwin reported that 120 academic staff had been involved in discussions about the future of the curriculum, during a recent one-day conference on the theme of Project 'Next'. Good progress had been made and the outcome was positive.



The Board Leads confirmed that the Academic Board Annual Assurance Report 2022/23 had been considered and commended for onward submission to the University Board. Overall, they had no hesitation in providing assurance that the Academic Board and its Sub-committees were fulfilling their responsibilities in line with the Articles of Government.

The Chair thanked Mr J Baldwin and Mrs Lowry for their update, noting that a written summary of the meeting had been circulated and posted on Teams.

**UB1243. Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

**UB1244. Date and Time of the Next Meeting**

The next meeting was due to take place at 5.00pm on Wednesday, 18 September 2024, to be preceded by a tour.

**Ian Fisher  
Clerk to the Board**