

University of Central Lancashire

Unreserved Minutes of the Board Meeting Held on 14 February 2024 at 5.00pm in the Conference Room, Adelphi Building, Preston Campus

Present:

Sue Ion (Chair)

Graham Baldwin
Jon Baldwin
Jim Carter
Luke Fitzgerald
Richard Frediani
Ridwanah Gurjee

Lesley Lloyd
Ruth Lowry
Lorraine Norris
Fiona Rayment
Lindsay Robinson
Lis Smith*

Also in attendance:

Lisa Brooks (Governance and Compliance Manager)
George Charles (Chief Finance Officer)
Ruth Connor (Deputy Chief Executive)
Ian Fisher (University Secretary and General Counsel and Clerk to the Board)
Carolyn Johnson (Executive Officer to the Vice-Chancellor)
Ken Lee (Chief People Officer)
Fiona Winters (Deputy Clerk to the Board/Head of Governance)

*via videoconference

UB1185. Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed all present, especially Richard Frediani and Dr Fiona Rayment, who were attending their first formal Board meeting as newly appointed Governors.

Apologies had been received from Richard Hext, Anne McCarthy and Khalil Rehman.

UB1186. Declaration of Interests

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

UB1187. Chair's Announcements

The Chair extended formal thanks on behalf of the Board, to Mike Tynan who had recently resigned due to personal reasons, for all his many years of outstanding service as a Board member and supporting the University in various other roles.

Dr Ion formally announced that her tenure as Chair of the Board was due to cease on 31 December 2024. In seeking to ensure a smooth transition, members were invited to express an interest in assuming the role of Chair by requesting an initial conversation with the Clerk to the Board. This was intended to ensure a fair process, given the preferred position which was to have an internal candidate in post as Chair Designate by the summer.

UB1188. Reserved and Unreserved Minutes of the University Board Meeting held on 23 November 2023

The Reserved and Unreserved Minutes of the meeting held on 23 November 2023 were agreed as a true record, to be signed by the Chair.

UB1189. 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 updated Risk Management Policy had been approved by the Governance, Risk and Nominations Committee at its meeting on 17 January 2024, where it was noted that the revised Risk Appetite Statement was more consistent with the Strategy and much improved (Item UB1172).
- (ii) Reserved Minute - Text Redacted.

UB1190. Vice-Chancellor's Report

The Vice-Chancellor presented his report which provided an update on external factors affecting the University and a summary of internal activity that was underway. A copy of the report is set out in the Minute Book.

Reserved Minute - Text Redacted

- (i) *Reserved Minute - Text Redacted*
- (ii) *UKVI Audit*

A UKVI audit had recently been conducted by the Home Office in relation to the recruitment of international students to ensure compliance with visa regulations. The process had been thorough and appeared to have gone well, although the outcome would not be known for 3 months. Given the scale and complexity of the University's international portfolio, it was anticipated that there would be some actions to follow up, although it was considered unlikely there would be significant problems or sanctions.

- (iii) *Research and Knowledge Exchange Festival*

The inaugural Research and Knowledge Exchange ('RKE') Festival had recently taken place across all four campuses, including the launch of 13 new RKE

Institutes. This had been a successful showcase for the University's research, over two thirds of which was ranked as internationally excellent or world leading. The Chair also commended the Knowledge Exchange activity that was underway, noting that this agenda was likely to drive the future allocation of funding and that the University was well placed to respond to any such initiatives. Professor Baldwin reported that whilst the Research Excellence Framework ('REF') continued, the Knowledge Exchange Framework ('KEF') would become increasingly important.

(iv) *The Sector and Financial Sustainability*

The sector was facing unprecedented challenges affecting financial sustainability. Informal consultations had begun regarding the 2024 pay award, with some universities expressing significant concerns about affordability, exacerbated by the increase in contributions to the Teacher Pension Scheme ('TPS') for post-1992 providers.

Recruitment, particularly international, had been difficult and some universities that were increasingly reliant on international student numbers, had announced cost cutting exercises. The shortfall in international student recruitment was leading to pressure to increase recruitment of UK students. However, clearly the inability to increase UK tuition fees added to the pressure.

Professor Baldwin noted that the Times Higher had apologised for the recent error in reporting on the University's accounts, which had since been corrected.

The Trade Unions had expressed concern about the potential implications of the financial pressures. The situation would continue to be monitored and further reports presented to the Resources Committee and the Board.

(v) *Reserved Minute - Text Redacted*

(vi) *Reserved Minute - Text Redacted*

(vii) *Reserved Minute - Text Redacted*

(viii) *Reserved Minute - Text Redacted*

(ix) *Reserved Minute - Text Redacted*

(x) *People*

Finally, Professor Baldwin was delighted to announce the appointment of Professor Janice Allan as the new Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic Leadership). Janice was currently Dean of the School of Business at Salford University and was excited to be joining UCLan on 15 April 2024.

The Chair thanked Professor Baldwin for his comprehensive report. Reserved Minute - Text Redacted.

Resolved: That

- (i) the Vice-Chancellor's Update Report be noted; and
- (ii) Reserved Minute - Text Redacted.

UB1191. Reserved Minute - Text Redacted

UB1192. Reserved Minute - Text Redacted

UB1193. Governance Update

The Chair reported that as previously agreed, a Governance Effectiveness Review ('GER') had now been initiated, with the assistance of Jim Edney and Jon Baldwin. Following feedback at the previous meeting, an external professional with extensive experience in governance across the higher education sector, had been appointed to ensure demonstrable independence, in compliance with the CUC Code. The GER would now commence shortly and a report would be presented to the Board in due course.

Resolved That:

- (i) the update on the Governance Effectiveness Review be noted; and
- (ii) a report be presented to the Board in due course.

UB1194. Committee Chair's/Board Lead Updates

(i) Governance, Risk and Nominations Committee - 17 January 2024

Dr Ion reported on the matters considered at the meeting of the Governance, Risk and Nominations Committee ('GRNC') at its meeting held on 17 January 2024, which fell under three headings as follows:

- *Compliance*

Having considered the standard report on the OfS regulatory framework, the Committee was satisfied that the University's arrangements for compliance and enhancement were appropriate, and that there were currently no matters of concern.

- *Reserved Minute - Text Redacted*

- *Board Appointments*

The Committee had considered the need to make several appointments to fill vacancies arising on the Board and its Committees, following the retirement of Mike Tynan. It was agreed to recommend: the appointment of Jon Baldwin as Chair of Resources Committee and, in turn, a member of GRNC; the

appointment of Khalil Rehman as an additional member of the Audit Committee, in the interests of succession planning and to avoid quoracy issues; and that a process be commenced to appoint a new independent Board member with expertise in finance, audit, cyber and/or human resources, bearing in mind that it might be expedient to co-opt an expert to advise on cyber issues.

Mrs Norris highlighted the need for a strategy to ensure that the EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) profile of the Board was considered as an integral part of the recruitment process. Mr Fisher undertook to consult with Mrs Norris in her role as Board EDI Lead and the Director of EDI during the recruitment process.

(ii) Reserved Minute - Text Redacted

(iii) Academic Board - 29 November 2023

Mr J Baldwin and Mrs Lowry reported that they had attended their first meeting of the Academic Board on 29 November 2023, for the purpose of providing assurance to the Board on academic governance matters.

The meeting had considered reports from the five committees of Academic Board, namely, the Portfolio and Planning Committee, the Teaching and Learning Committee, the Academic Quality and Standards Committee, the Research, Knowledge Exchange and Ethics Committee and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee.

Mr J Baldwin understood that the purpose of the meeting was to consider reports giving assurance of compliance with OfS and other regulatory body expectations, however, this did not appear to encourage vigorous academic debate. Professor Baldwin acknowledged that the meeting was structured around compliance, noting that more animated discussions took place at the lower levels of the Academic Board structure.

The following issues were highlighted to the Board:

- The Academic Quality and Standards Committee was actively overseeing the support for the effective delivery, management and operation of DAs. The Ofsted Self-Assessment Report and associated Quality Improvement Plan which had been received at the last Board meeting, had been approved.
- The 2023 Degree Outcomes Statement had been approved, which was designed to ensure rigour in the determination of degree classifications.
- The report from the Research, Knowledge Exchange and Ethics Committee provided suitable assurance around the University's research licenses.
- There had been an interesting debate around tuition fees and value for money.

Overall, assurance could be taken that the Academic Board was fulfilling its responsibilities with rigour and integrity. The Chair added that ongoing work to rationalise the large portfolio of modules was important.

(iv) Safeguarding and Prevent Briefing - 25 January 2024

Mrs Lowry reported that she and Mr J Baldwin had attended a Safeguarding and Prevent Governors' Masterclass in their respective roles as Board Leads for Safeguarding and Prevent. The session had been delivered by colleagues from Student Services and the People Team and covered the following:

- arrangements to promote a Safeguarding culture at UCLan, including the Safeguarding network; the new Safeguarding, Mental Health and Wellbeing (SMHW) Committee, and work towards the Mental Health Charter;
- statistics demonstrating how learners accessed support, including the numbers of Counselling, Mental Health and Wellbeing, Safeguarding and DBS referrals;
- policies, procedures, partnership arrangements, dashboard monitoring and a suite of mandatory and role specific training for all stakeholders, designed to keep learners safe;
- processes to ensure the safe recruitment of staff including DBS checks where required.

Mrs Lowry confirmed that she had every confidence in assuring the Board that the University had robust arrangements in place to satisfy the Safeguarding and Prevent agendas. It was agreed to circulate the presentation slides to all members of the Board for information.

Resolved: That

- (i) the updates from Committee Chairs and Board Leads for Safeguarding and Prevent be noted;
- (ii) the Board was assured that the Academic Board was effectively fulfilling its responsibilities in terms of academic governance;
- (iii) Jon Baldwin be appointed as Chair of the Resources Committee and a member of GRNC with immediate effect;
- (iv) Khalil Rehman be appointed as a member of the Audit Committee with immediate effect; and

- (v) a process be commenced to appoint a new Independent Governor with expertise in finance, audit, human resources and/or cyber, who may be a co-opted member.

UB1195. Students' Union Update

Mr Fitzgerald, President of the Students' Union, presented his report giving an update on key initiatives being taken forward by the Students' Union and current issues affecting the student community. A copy of the report is included in the Minute Book.

In summarising the report, Mr Fitzgerald drew attention to the following recent highlights:

- A successful Student Representative Conference (REP CON) 2024 on the theme of 'Leading Together' involving collaboration with colleagues from UCLan and a guest from WonkHE, which had the potential to lead to future sponsorship.
- Two impactful campaigns led by and designed to support the trans community, focused on banning conversion therapy and developing a new Progressive Preferred Name Policy.
- The Big Ideas Platform which had successfully championed several initiatives to foster change on campus and beyond, including the creation of additional prayer spaces in the Library and Harrington Building.

The Students' Union was also working to support students with current areas of concern including: making the Mitigating Circumstances Procedure more accessible; tackling loneliness by hosting 'get togethers' for students from marginalised communities; supporting students through the cost-of-living crisis by working with University services to provide free food during the exam period; and co-ordinating with local services to address increased incidents of substance abuse and spiking affecting the student community.

Resolved: That the Students' Union Report be noted and welcomed as a regular item on the agenda of the University Board.

UB1196. Any Other Business

- (i) *Visit to the Students' Union Facilities*

The Chair invited feedback on the tour of the Students' Union facilities which had preceded the Board meeting. Members concurred that the space was impressive, the team comprised a talented group of committed individuals, and the concept of the campaigns and activities being student driven was commendable. The focus on providing a safe space to support students was particularly important in the context of current challenges, and complimented the work carried out by the University's Student Services. It was suggested that the voluntary work undertaken by students be promoted to highlight the benefits to the local region.

(ii) *Student Support*

Mrs Lloyd raised a concern about reports of female students being treated harshly by other universities for being sex workers, including being excluded from their accommodation and/or their courses. Having consulted with Student Services, Professor Baldwin reported that the University did not have a specific policy, although the general issues were addressed within other policies and procedures. No such incidents had been reported in student accommodation, where the contract prohibited any business being carried out on the premises. The University would continue to monitor the situation.

The Chair advised that male and female students be briefed about the safe use of social media and the associated risks as part of their induction. It was suggested that colleagues from Student Services be invited to provide an update at a future residential meeting of the Board, on the extensive work to support students carried out in collaboration with the Students' Union.

UB1197. Date and Time of the Next Meeting

The next meeting would take place on 11 April 2024, to be preceded by a visit to the School of Veterinary Medicine.

Ian Fisher
Clerk to the Board