

MINUTES

BOARD OF GOVERNORS, BG-134

Date: Wednesday 2 October 2024

Time: 1430

Location: CA105/6, Catalyst, Leek Rd

Members		
Gemma Brierley	External Member	P
Jonathan Chapman	External Member	P(T)
Mohit Dhingra	External Member	P
Kevin Gould	External Member	P
Chris Headleand	Staff Governor (academic staff)	P(T)
Colin Hughes (Chair)	External Member	P
Professor Martin Jones	Vice Chancellor	P
Baljinder Kuller	External Member	P
Joseph Knight	Student Governor (vice president of Student Union)	P
Kim Newell Chebator	External Member	P
Precious Ogbein	Student Governor (president of Student Union)	P
Martin Pugh	External Member	P
Josie Morris	External Member	A
Juliet Oosthuysen	External Member	P
Marta Vizcaya Echano	Staff Governor (professional services staff)	A
In attendance		
Ian Blachford	Chief Operating Officer and Clerk to the Board of Governors	IA
Dr Annabel Kiernan	Pro Vice Chancellor - Education	IA(T)
Sally McGill	Chief Financial Officer	IA
Professor Raheel Nawaz	Pro Vice Chancellor – Digital Transformation	IA
Sue Boyce	Assistant Clerk to the Board of Governors (<i>minutes</i>)	IA

P = Present; A = Apologies; Ab = Absent; L = Late; IA = In Attendance; T = via Teams


1 MEETING MANAGEMENT

2921 **Apologies for absence** were received from Josie Morris and Marta Vizcaya Echano.

2922 There were no new **declarations of interest**.

2923 **Membership of the Board of Governors for 2024-25:**

Constitution	Membership
External	Gemma Brierley
Members	Dr Jonathan Chapman (Deputy Chair)
	Mohit Dhingra
	Kevin Gould
	Colin Hughes (Chair)
	Baljinder Kuller
	Josie Morris
	Kim Newell Chebator

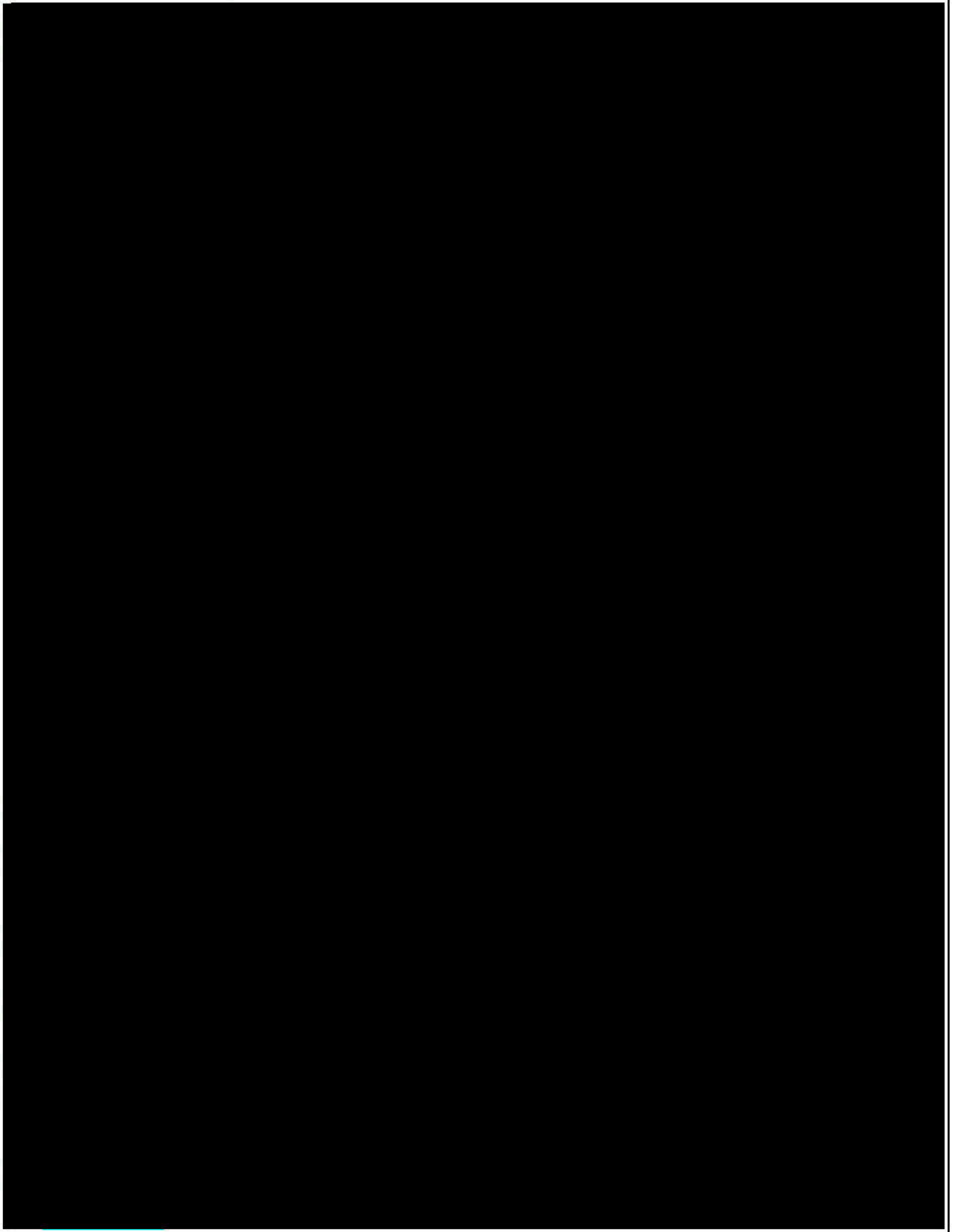
	<p>Juliet Oosthuysen Martin Pugh</p> <p>Student Governors Precious Ogbein (President, Students' Union) Joseph Knight (Vice President, Students' Union)</p> <p>Staff Governors Chris Headleand (Academic Staff governor) Marta Vizcaya Echano (Professional Support governor)</p> <p>Vice Chancellor Professor Martin Jones</p> <p>In attendance Ian Blachford, Chief Operating Officer & Clerk to the Board Professor Annabel Kiernan, Pro Vice Chancellor - Academic Sally McGill, Chief Financial Officer & Deputy Chief Executive Professor Raheel Nawaz, Pro Vice Chancellor – Digital Transformation</p> <p>Co-opted Committee Members for 2024-25:</p> <p>Ian Jenkinson Sustainability and Resources Committee Vacancy Sustainability and Resources Committee</p>
2924	<p>Minutes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BG/134/01 Last meeting of the Board of Governors , 28 June 2024 [BG 133] • BG/134/02 Extraordinary Meeting [Student Village], 03 July 24 [BG 133a] • BG/134/03 Chair's Action, [University of Staffordshire name change], 19 August 2024 [BG 133b] <p>The above minutes were confirmed as a true and accurate record.</p>
2925	<p>Matters arising:</p> <p>To note that Eleanor Morrissey resigned from the Board on 30 July to take up an employed role at the University of Manchester. We therefore now have 10 governors which is the constitutional requirement. The Nominations and Governance Committee will consider the next steps.</p> <p>Minute 2909 - (BG-133) Student Village Project – the contract was signed on 4 July 2024 and a full update appears on the agenda.</p> <p></p> <p>Minute 2913 - (BG-133) Branding Update – to note that the OfS and the DfE had approved the University name change and that this had been communicated to governors on 2 August 2024. A paper on the brand launch appears on the agenda.</p> <p>Minute 2918 – Nominations and Governance – to note that the renewals and committee membership had been approved by email following the last Board of Governors meeting.</p>
2 STRATEGIC OVERVIEW	
2926	<p>The Vice Chancellor's Report BG/134/04 was introduced for discussion by Professor Martin Jones.</p> <p>This report provides a brief summary of the major developments in the external landscape since our last meeting and the potential challenges and opportunities they pose for us. An update on some of the broader activities that are taking place is also included and an update on new senior staff appointments during this period.</p> <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kim Newell Chebator inquired about the potential impact of the Department for Education's (DfE) focus on skills. Martin Jones responded that this presents an opportunity that the University is keen to engage with, noting that development funding would be available. He also mentioned that while reforms could pose a threat, most of the higher education sector is not currently focusing on this area. • Colin Hughes suggested that this topic be discussed at the upcoming Strategic Event in November. He also noted that Skills England will abolish ifATE next year which is a significant development. • Precious Ogbein noted the OfS' new requirement for higher education providers to protect students from harassment and sexual misconduct. She requested that the Student's Union collaborate with the University on this matter. Annabel Kiernan agreed to support this initiative and include it as a topic for the next meeting with the Student Union. • Kevin Gould asked whether the recent visit from the OfS was targeted or random. Martin Jones clarified that institutions receive regulatory visits, but the recent visit by Jean Arnold was a relationship visit. He reported that feedback was positive and the visit was very successful.

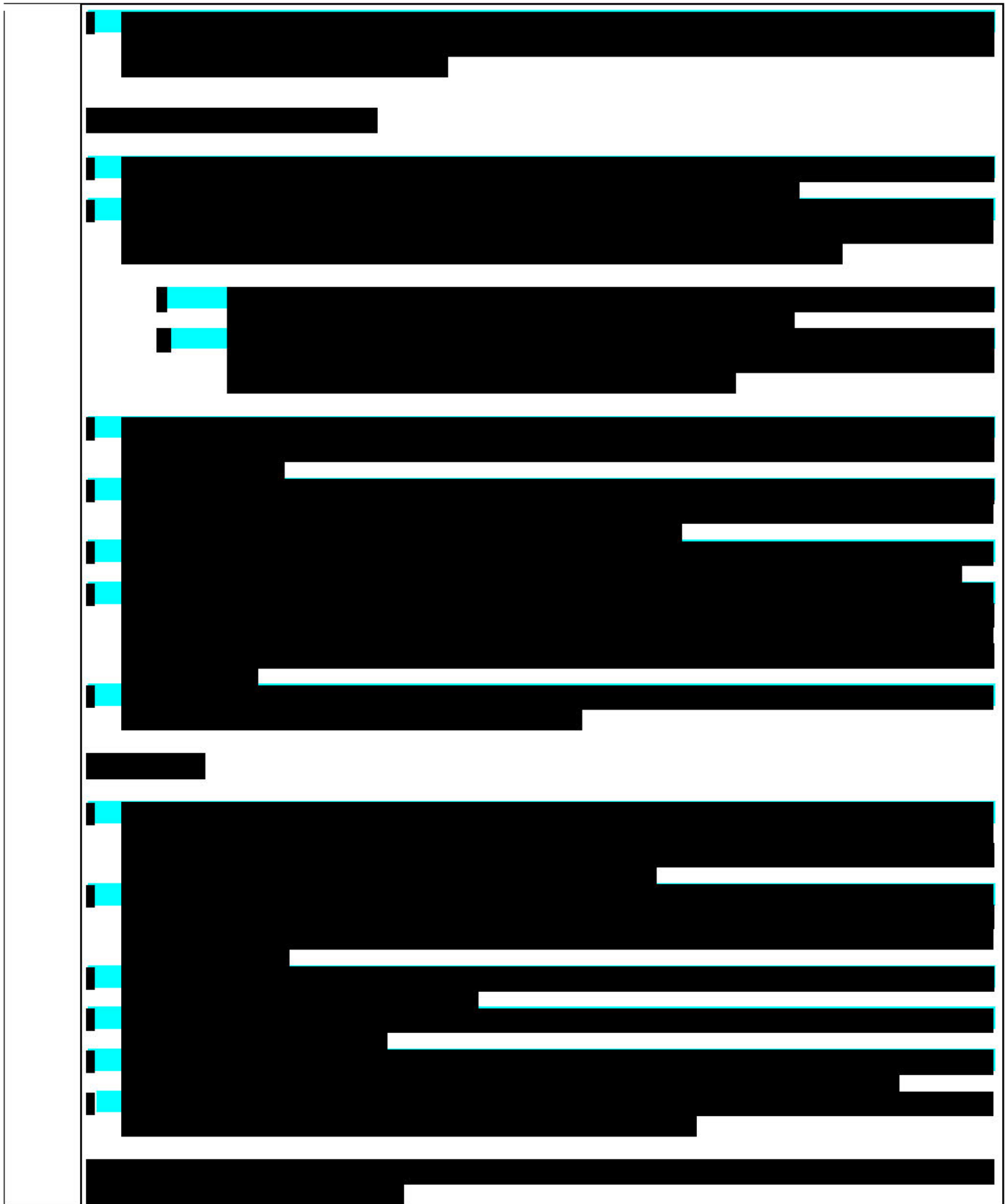
- Mohit Dhingra inquired about the concerns that OfS had regarding the delivery of higher education. Martin Jones responded that a recurring theme across their inspection visits had been differential learning experiences by courses/cohorts and the resources available on the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). An internal review has been completed at the University, following this learning being shared and no issues have been found.
- Kevin Gould commended the University for the SDG results, noting that it is ranked 2nd in UK for quality in education.

There were no further comments and the report was noted.

3 FOR DISCUSSION AND/OR APPROVAL (marked below accordingly)

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The Draft Financial Out-turn 2023-24 (based on Draft Financial Statements for y/e 31 July 2024 and Management Accounts for P12) BG/134/06 was introduced for discussion by the Chief Financial Officer & Deputy Chief Executive.


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- The audited statements are to be recommended for approval and sign-off by the Board of Governors at its meeting on 26th November 2024, after having also been presented to Audit and Risk Committee on 30th October 2024 and the Sustainability and Resources Committee on 13th November 2024.
- The tables were provided to give a summary of the University's financial performance for the year, which would be shown in more detail in the financial statements.

Members and attendees commented as follows:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It was noted that the University's financial performance within the last academic year had been impressive, in stabilising the financials in year, as a consequence of the fall in income. It was noted that this has been delivered well and timely. <p>There were no further comments and the report was noted.</p>
2929	<p>The Bad Debt Provision – Financial Statements 2023 - 2024 BG/134/07 was introduced for approval by the Chief Financial Officer & Deputy Chief Executive and the paper outlines the bad debt provision that is to be disclosed in the 2023/24 Financial Statements for Staffordshire University. The decrease in the bad debt provision relates to four main areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Home Students: Finance continue to review and adapt their debt collection processes and procedures, these changes have help facilitate the collection of this debt more successfully than previous years. International Students: This academic year has seen a considerable decrease in income from international students and the bad debt provision has been affected accordingly. This has been reflected in the year end debt for international students where total debt outstanding for international students was £4,678,057 in 2022/23, it has decreased to £720,756 in 2023/24, a decrease of £3,957,301. Ex-students: The provision for ex-students (including debt agency) has increased by £289,316, this highlights the difficulty in collecting debt from ex-students, many of whom do not complete their studies and therefore the University does not have any effective leverage i.e. a certificate. During the year, Credit Control has worked closely with our debt collection agency to review all debt currently being chased by them. All debt that both parties believe is uncollectable or financial unviable to chase has been written off this year. Student Loan Company (SLC): The provision for Student Loan Company (SLC) has decreased by £252,528 in the year and this provision is split between Not Due (10% provision), 2023/24 Overdue Debt (20% provision) and Prior to 2023/24 Overdue Debt (100% provision). The provision for the SLC invoices not due remains circa £800k, similar to 22/23. However, the overdue current year debt and the overdue prior year debt has decreased by £289,876 from £493,016, in 22/23, to £203,140 in 23/24. This is mainly due to new processes and procedures implemented in Finance, in the financial year, which has facilitated collection of this older SLC debt. <p>There were no further comments and the report was approved.</p>
2930	<p>The Student Number and Income Final Update 2023/24 & Latest Student Number and Income Forecast 2024-25 BG/134/08 was introduced for discussion by Chief Financial Officer and Deputy Chief Executive, Sally McGill.</p> <p>The paper outlines that the September 2024 full-time undergraduate predicted intake of 2,496 student FTE represents a reduction of 222 FTE against the 2023/24 intake of 2,718 (£0.8m reduction in income). There is a further reduction in student numbers; 332 FTE (from 5,019 to 4,687) reduction in continuing students (£1.2m reduction in income), reflecting the smaller cohorts progressing from 2023/24 to 2024/25, compared to progressing cohorts from 2022/23 to 2023/24. Income reduction is smaller than FTE, as the 2023/24 actual outturn incorporates an element of non-fee payers, mainly Erasmus exchange students. The revised September 2024 predictions for full-time postgraduate student recruitment indicate a reduction of 214 student FTE, from 1,046 in 2023/24 to 832 in 2024/25 (2.0m reduction in income; a smaller per FTE reduction in income due to favourable movement in mix of fees).</p> <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Martin Pugh inquired about the lower than expected postgraduate enrolment figures. Ian Blachford noted that the University has historically struggled to attract sufficient numbers of domestic postgraduate students and has not met its desired targets in this area. The TOM had looked to consider how we processed these applications differently and marketed them differently. There was more work to be done on the postgraduate portfolio that sat with schools. The international numbers however, had been the larger cause of financial variance against budget. It was noted by all that the future focus of the university must be on income growth through undergraduate and postgraduate provision and this would be a theme that would be returned to at the strategic event. <p>There were no further comments and the report was noted.</p>
2931	<p>The Final Approval of Draft Budget for 2024/25 BG/134/09 was introduced for approval by the Chief Financial Officer and Deputy Chief Executive, Sally McGill.</p> <p>In line with the Student Number Forecast and Income update paper found elsewhere in the agenda, Appendix E, shows the latest update on the recruitment position and the impact on the forecast for 2024-25 (compared to the draft budget set out in the rest of this paper). The overall impact is a loss of contribution (ie a gap to make up on top of the proposed budget savings) of £1.7m.</p> <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p>

	<p>[REDACTED]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion ensued on the possible changes to how the apprenticeship levy may be used in the future, subject to further consideration by the Government – for both how the university spends its own levy and also how levy payers use this to fund students on some of our provision. • Mohit Dhingra asked about the sector average for staff costs. Sally McGill confirmed that the average is 56% territory. She advised that the University’s staff costs appear lower in comparison because income from partnerships, such as with CECOS, is included in our income figures, but not then reflected in the staffing profile. <p>There were no further comments and the report was approved.</p>
2932	<p>The Strategic Financial Plan 2024-2029 BG/134/10 was introduced for approval by the Chief Financial Officer & Deputy Chief Executive, Sally McGill.</p> <p>The plan is to be submitted to the OfS via the Annual Financial Return (AFR) in December 2024 along with the signed audited financial statements of the University for 2024/25.</p> <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion ensued on how the focus recently had been on managing costs and now the focus should shift to achieving growth in alignment with the University’s strategy. It was agreed that potential growth areas should be a key topic at the Strategic Event in November. <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>It was agreed that Strategic Financial Plan would be brought back to a future Board of Governors meeting, following discussions on the income growth projections, contained within this.</p>
2933	<p>[REDACTED]</p>
2934	<p>The Target Operating Model BG/134/12 was introduced for discussion by the Chief Operating Officer, Ian Blachford.</p> <p>The Target Operating Model Consultation Document is attached as an Appendix to this report. The following salient points were highlighted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The recognised trade unions, UCU and UNISON were briefed on the consultation document on 25th September 2024. • Consultation commenced with all staff on 30th September 2024. The launch of the consultation was a face to face and recorded live stream event, as per the previous sessions, when we have kept staff informed of the development journey. A number of different virtual and face to face sessions will take place during the consultation period.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation will conclude on 14th November 2024 and subject to consultation considerations, we will then move to implementation. • The proposed date of implementation is 31st January 2024. The programme originally sought to implement by 31st December, which may not be possible. Financials had been developed on the basis of implementation by 31st January 2025. • The full year budget set for the 2024-2025 academic year for staffing costs for professional services is £32.6m after assumed in-year savings of £2.4m. The structure proposed in the consultation document has been costed at £32.5m. Allowing for the mid-year implementation and an element of vacancies and potential early leavers within the consultation, the proposed structures are broadly matched against budget. For information, the staffing budget for professional services was £35.0m prior to the creation of the business case. Please note these figures do not include Untempts (agency) expenditure for the covering of longer-term absences or specific assignments. • The session was recorded and circulated to the Board of Governors so that they can understand the entirety of this substantial change programme. <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ian Blachford highlighted that the unions were satisfied with the comprehensive suite of documents and the level of detail in the business case, which included all job descriptions, structure charts and CPD frameworks. • Joseph Knight inquired about the inclusion of Student Union representation on the UEB board as proposed in the new model. Ian Blachford responded that historically there had been no student representation on the UEB and that this would remain the case. <p>There were no further comments and an updated report will be provided at the next Sustainability and Resources Committee for onward referral to the Board.</p>
2935	<p>The Draft Governance Arrangements for the Student Village BG/134/13 paper was introduced for approval by the Chief Financial Officer & Deputy Chief Executive, Sally McGill.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The report outlines that the University has two relationships, and therefore two sets of risks, to manage. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The first relationship is between SU Residential Services Limited, a wholly owned subsidiary of Staffordshire University, which holds an equity investment in the Special Purpose Vehicle created to deliver the project - Staffordshire Campus Living (SCL) LLP. • The second relationship is one between the University and SCL, and has two phases : the construction phase (to practical completion of the new Village, the Clarice Cliff Court refurbishment, the Hub and Bridge in September 2026) and the operational phase for 50 years to September 2076. • SCL has formed a consortium of contractors and sub-contractors to deliver the two phases of the project. • The report highlighted that assurance would be provided through a report to every meeting of Sustainability and Resource Committee and then onward Referral to the Board. • It also details that a Student village Oversight Group has been formed, chaired by the Chief Financial Officer. The Oversight Group will provide assurance to the University Executive Board (UEB) through monthly reporting in relation t compliance with the project documents entered into by the University and by SU Residential Services Limited. The Group (which currently meets fortnightly) and has representatives from all of the teams within the University who have interactions with SCL, or provide support services, including the Student Union, <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kevin Gould asked for more details on the practical implementation of the proposed governance structure. Sally McGill agreed to provide this information at the next meeting. <p>There were no further comments and the report was approved.</p>
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2937	<p>The Student Satisfaction Report (NSS) 2024 BG/134/15 was introduced for discussion by Pro Vice Chancellor Academic, Annabel Kiernan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The paper highlights that the University's NSS results improved in 2024, with gains in overall positivity outpacing the sector (+2.2pp compared to a sector average of +1.14pp). However, this has not resulted in improvements to our league table position, as key competitors have shown stronger improvements. There is also significant variability in NSS performance across the University portfolio. • Insights gained from thematic trend analysis (via ChatGPT) indicates that previous issues – lecturer quality and timetabling – have noticeably improved, but been succeeded by concerns about marking and feedback and communication and support. This is corroborated by insights from the University's new risk-based course monitoring meetings, brought forward to August/September for courses 'at risk' – as defined by below-benchmark performance on key metrics including NSS – to facilitate in-year action and accelerate progress. • Actions to deliver in-year improvements have been identified at course, department and institutional level, as well as good practices to share and embed across the University. Progress will be measured via a 'pulse' survey in October to identify impact and any further in-year action necessary. <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion ensued on how the sector generally is facing a variety of challenges, Martin Jones questioned whether our current approach is dynamic enough given that the league tables significantly influence student recruitment, and that we had a falling position in both the NSS rankings and league tables as a consequence. • Annabel Kiernan commented that areas of underperformance were brought to the Strategy and Performance Committee, leading to a new strategy being implemented in August. This includes additional assurance measures and a comprehensive review, which provided valuable insights. The upcoming pulse survey will indicate if these changes are effective across the schools. • Kim Newell Chebator highlighted the successful use of ChatGPT in some areas and suggested its broader application. She also noted that some NSS scores had reversed over time and questioned if urgent issues were being prioritised at the expense of areas where students had previously been satisfied. Annabel Kiernan agreed on the need for continuous monitoring to prevent recurring issues. • Mohit Dhingra inquired whether areas were being identified that would reap the most benefits, and, of the gains documented in Appendix A, were actions specific enough to address the core. He also asked about the process for resolving issues and how their resolution to ensure timely and accurate responses. • Annabel Kiernan responded that an institutional action plan with established protocols is now in place to enhance the student experience. This new approach is more dynamic, allowing the University to identify and address issues before the next reporting windows. • Martin Pugh mentioned that the Strategy and Performance Committee had previously been informed of reporting challenges within the programme. He questioned whether the briefing process needed to be more specific. Annabel Kiernan confirmed that efforts are being made to emphasize the importance of survey completion to students. • Colin Hughes requested an update for the Strategy and Performance Committee, including specific issues being addressed with timelines for expected outcomes, for each of the poorly performing areas, i.e. those below the university average. <p>There were no further comments and the report was noted.</p>
2938	<p>The Brand Evolution Project Update BG/134/16 was introduced for discussion by Pro Vice Chancellor Academic, Annabel Kiernan who highlighted the following main points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On Friday 20 September 2024 we officially launched University of Staffordshire to our internal audiences. On Monday 23 September 2024 we launched to our external stakeholders. This paper provides a summary of activity that has happened since the last update as we have worked through the implementation to the brand activation stage. With agreement from the Executive, the brand launch is a phased approach. <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Juliet Oosthuysen praised the successful execution of the University's branding efforts, noting the institution had begun to reposition itself. She emphasized that this is an ongoing process and stressed the importance of presenting a unified experience across all aspects and touchpoints. <p>There were no further comments and the report was noted.</p>
2939	<p>The University of Staffordshire Name Change (including Resolutions for signing by Chair), BG/134/17.</p>

	<p>The Board of Governors noted the decision of the Chair of the Board of Governors by way of Chair's action to implement the decision to change the name of the University with effect from 23 September 2024. The Board of Governors noted the receipt of a non-objection letter from the Department for Education to the use of 'University of Staffordshire' in the name of each of the University's wholly-owned subsidiary companies.</p> <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Precious Ogbein asked whether the name of the Student Union had been considered in the name change. Ian Blachford confirmed that the Head of Legal Services was in discussion with Ken Sankson, Chief Executive of the Student Union about this matter. • Colin Hughes asked that a comprehensive document and style guide to be made available reflecting the new branding and positioning. It was confirmed that this was in development. <p>There were no further comments and the resolutions were signed by the Chair to the Board of Governors at the meeting.</p>
2940	<p>The Board were asked to approve the Collaborative Academic Provision Register 2024-25 BG/134/18. This is the formal list of academic partnerships and the courses delivered in partnership as of August 2024.</p> <p>The following main points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The University is required to provide an external list of our arrangements as part of its overall quality management framework; this Collaborative Register provides an authoritative list of the University collaborative academic partners, and the courses they deliver, as at September 2024. • The University's partnership activity responds to strategic priorities linked to university KPIs as well as reflecting HE sector and policy developments across UK and international contexts. Over recent years, the University has reviewed and streamlined its collaborative portfolio to align provision to enhance academic fit, quality considerations and sustainability. The University has reviewed and enhanced the Collaborative Academic Quality Framework Policies and Procedures, to ensure these reflect sector requirements and the University structures and practice during the 2023-24 Academic Year. The modifications to the Staffordshire University (SU) partnership approval and review policy enhances partnership alignment with SU's organisational, regional, national and global priorities, factoring in academic and quality matters, financial viability, and growth potential in partnership scope, recruitment and reputational impact. <p>The Collaborative Academic Provision Register was approved.</p>
2941	<p>The Board received for approval the Students' Union Memorandum of Understanding 2024-2025 BG/134/19. The memorandum of Understanding with the Student Union is refreshed annually and approved by the Board of Trustees of the Student Union and the University.</p> <p>There were no comments and the Memorandum of Understanding was approved for the academic year 2024-2025.</p>
4 FOR INFORMATION	
2942	<p>The Students' Union Report BG/134/20 was received by the Board and noted for information.</p> <p>Martin Pugh praised the standard of the paper which outlines clear issues and concerns. Martin Jones added that the academic board were also pleased with the comprehensive quality of the report.</p> <p>There were no further comments and the report was noted.</p>
2943	<p>Academic Board minutes 295 (confirmed): 19 June 2024 BG/134/21</p> <p>The academic board confirmed minutes were noted for information.</p>
5 ADDITIONAL MATTERS	
2944	<p>Any additional matters None</p>
2945	<p>Next meeting: Tuesday 26 November 2024 (CA105/6, Catalyst, Leek Rd)</p>