

# MINUTES

## BOARD OF GOVERNORS, BG-120

**Date:** Wednesday 21 April 2021

**Time:** 1500

**Location:** Boardroom, University House/online Teams meeting

*Notes:*

1. *Items marked with an asterisk (starred items) were for information only or regarded as noncontentious.*
2. *Items classified as Confidential, and their subsequent minutes (highlighted here in blue), will be redacted before publication of the agenda and minutes on the University's public website.*

<b>Members</b>		
Professor Liz Barnes	Vice Chancellor	P
Connor Bayliss	Student Governor (President, Students' Union)	P
Glenn Earlam	External Member	P
Tony Evans	External Member	Ab
Tuesday Forrest	Student Governor (Vice-President, Students' Union)	A
Hannah Gibbard	Staff Governor (professional support staff)	P
Kevin Gould	External Member	A
Joanne Hannaford	External Member	L
John Henderson (Deputy Chair)	External Member	P
Dr Cathryn Hickey	External Member	P
Colin Hughes (Chair)	External Member	P
Baljinder Kuller	External Member	P
Dr Simon Smith	Staff Governor (academic staff)	P
Jonathan Vardon	External Member	A
Sara Williams	External Member	L
<b>In attendance</b>		
Ian Blachford	Chief Operating Officer and Clerk to the Board of Governors	IA
Professor Martin Jones	Deputy Vice Chancellor	IA
Sally McGill	Chief Financial Officer	IA
Andrew Proctor	Pro Vice Chancellor - Digital	IA
Lauren Rooke	Assistant Clerk to the Board of Governors ( <i>minutes</i> )	IA
Lord Stafford	Chancellor	IA

*P = Present (via Teams); A = Apologies; Ab = Absent; L = Late; IA = In Attendance (via Teams)*

**Know Your Business (1500 - 1530)** – a presentation was received from the Director of Library & Student Services on Student Mental Health & Wellbeing - impact and implications of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Members and attendees responded as follows:

- Martin Jones asked about the response on a community level, rather than solely within the University. Ian Munton gave an overview, citing successes within our NHS partnerships (and more engagement from FE).

- Colin Hughes asked about ensuring a continued positive legacy from the project. Ian Munton noted that the many improvements and changes that had been implemented would be kept under review.

<b>1 MEETING MANAGEMENT</b>	
2725	<b>Apologies for Absence</b> were received from Tuesday Forrest, Kevin Gould and Jonathan Vardon. Tony Evans was absent.
2726	There were no new <b>Declarations of Interest</b> .
2727	<b>The Minutes of the last meetings of the Board of Governors</b> , 24 November 2020 BG/120/01, 5 March 2021 BG/120/01a and 19 March 2021 BG/120/01b were confirmed as true and accurate records.
2728	<p><b>Matters arising:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Minute 2703 – Prevent annual report and return 2019-20</b> – it was noted that following approval at the 24 November 2020 Board of Governors meeting, and submission prior to the deadline on 1 December 2020, OfS had confirmed via email on 30 March 2021 that the University’s Prevent assessment for 2019-20 had been concluded.</li> <li><b>Minute 2713 – Staffordshire University: London business case phase two expansion</b> – it was noted that following approval at Board of Governors on 5 March 2021, the University had now moved into implementation phase and progress reports would be a standing item at Sustainability &amp; Resources Committee.</li> <li><b>Minute 2714 – Student accommodation architects tender – i)</b> it was noted that following Board of Governors on 5 March 2021, the paper that had been presented to Sustainability and Resources Committee in November 2020 regarding the funding model for the development had been circulated to the Board of Governors on 9 March 2021 by email; <b>ii)</b> following approval by Board of Governors on 5 March 2021, FCB had been appointed for this project as proposed, and progress reports would be a standing item at Sustainability &amp; Resources Committee.</li> <li><b>Minute 2715 – Internal Audit tender 2021-24</b> – it was noted that following approval at Board of Governors on 5 March 2021, KPMG had been appointed (WEF 1 January 2022) and RSM would quote for the part-year of 1 August 2021 to 31 December 2021.</li> <li><b>Minute 191 (SP-11 Matters Arising)- Academic quality and standards eco-system</b> – it was noted that this would now be presented at the June 2021 meeting of Academic Board and would then proceed to Board of Governors.</li> </ul>
<b>2 STRATEGIC OVERVIEW</b>	
2729	<p>The Board received a report on <b>Strategic Developments and Organisational Performance</b> BG/120/02 from the Vice Chancellor, covering the following main areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>External context since the last report in November 2020 (including the position with the Augar Review and the government’s direction of travel)</li> <li>University performance and University business (including REF, estates developments and recent events)</li> <li>Staff developments, including new appointments</li> </ul> <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Martin Jones noted his concern about the lack of clarity from the government around FE funding, as well as around its approach towards MATs and super-MATs. (Liz Barnes highlighted that SUAT had recently been commended by the DfE for its performance and model.)</li> <li>Lord Stafford commended the developments with the new nurse and forest school, highlighting his involvement with a national charity that worked to enable access to rural environments for all children.</li> <li>Colin Hughes asked about the response from Jonathan Gullis and Michele Donelan to their recent virtual tour and Liz Barnes noted that both were keen to attend in person as soon as possible.</li> </ul>
2730	<p>The Board received a paper on <b>Support for Class of 2021</b> BG/120/03, which gave an overview of the range of support services offered and planned for the future, with the Vice Chancellor highlighting initiatives such as the University’s current collaboration for graduates with Amazon Web Services.</p> <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Martin Jones noted the relevance of some of the measures to the University’s KPI around regional graduate retention.</li> <li>Liz Barnes highlighted the Get Ahead programme for current students, starting in May 2021, which would give all students a reason to return to campus.</li> <li>Simon Smith highlighted recent statistics in the media around high rates of Covid-related unemployment amongst the under-25s. Liz Barnes clarified that the 50% fees discount applied to both 2020 and 2021 graduates, and previous graduates would also be eligible for a lower discount, as normal.</li> </ul>
<b>3 SUB-COMMITTEE BRIEFING SHEETS AND REFERRED ITEMS</b>	

2731	<p>The <b>BRIEFING SHEETS</b> for Audit and Risk Committee, 26 January 2021 BG/120/04 and 9 March 2021 BG/120/05 were introduced by the Clerk to the Board of Governors.</p> <p><b>For approval</b></p> <p>a. <b>Minute 1777 (following minutes 1756 and 1760, 26 Jan 2021) - University-level risk registers (9 March 2021)</b> BG/120/06 (and on SharePoint) The high-level risk registers, introduced by the Chief Operating Officer, were approved,</p> <p><b>For information</b></p> <p>b. <b>*Minute 1778 - Health, Safety and Wellbeing Annual Report (9 March 2021)*</b> BG/120/07 (and on SharePoint) The report, setting out the main headlines in this area and signposting future areas for development, was noted.</p> <p>c. <b>Minute 1782 – External audit re-tender</b> BG/120/08 The paper, which set out the proposed procedure and timeline, was noted.</p>
2732	<p>The <b>BRIEFING SHEET</b> for Strategy and Performance Committee, 23 February 2021 BG/120/09 was introduced by the Committee Chair.</p> <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Liz Barnes highlighted that the Committee recognised the work to be done on improving retention and achievement rates for BAME students and this was echoed by Colin Hughes.</li> <li>• Sara Williams underlined the importance of having a data baseline for these metrics and tracking the University’s progress over time.</li> <li>• Simon Smith highlighted the point made by Professor David Olusoga OBE at the recent staff conference regarding HEIs being unable to see their own deficiencies as “liberal” organisations and Ian Blachford confirmed that the University was sharing knowledge and best practice with other HEIs to further develop its approach to inclusion.</li> </ul> <p><b>For information</b></p> <p>a. <b>Minute 193 - Briefing on 21 January 2020 DfE announcements</b> BG/120/10 The presentation and executive summary, outlining the headlines of the recent announcements, were noted.</p> <p>b. <b>*Minute 198 – Evaluating Delivery of the University Strategic Plan (Connected Communities)*</b> BG/120/11 The report, which brought together high-level information on the achievement of this pillar of the strategic plan, was noted.</p> <p>c. <b>*Minute 199 – KPI Report*</b>, BG/120/12 The paper, which reported on the University’s top five KPIs, was noted.</p> <p>d. <b>Minute 204 – Apprenticeships performance and monitoring</b> BG/120/13 The report, which included a financial update, performance analysis and details of Covid impact, was noted.</p>
2733	<p>The <b>BRIEFING SHEET</b> for Sustainability and Resources Committee, 16 March 2021 BG/120/14 was introduced by the Committee Chair.</p> <p><b>For approval</b></p> <p>a. <b>Minute 360 – Bad debt write-offs</b> BG/120/15 The proposal, approved by Sustainability and Resources Committee, was approved.</p> <p><b>For information</b></p> <p>b. <b>Minute 358 - Student numbers and projected financial impact (in-year update)</b> BG/120/16 The report setting out the current position was noted.</p> <p>c. <b>*Minute 361 - Management Accounts (to 31 Feb 2020)*</b> BG/120/17 The paper was noted.</p> <p>d. <b>*Minute 364 – Human Resources and organisational Development Annual Report*</b> BG/120/18 The report, setting out the main headlines in this area and signposting future areas for development, was noted.</p> <p>e. <b>*Minute 365 – Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report*</b> BG/120/19 The report, setting out the main headlines in this area and signposting future areas for development, was noted.</p>
<b>3 FOR DISCUSSION AND/OR APPROVAL (marked below accordingly)</b>	
2734	<p>A presentation on recent <b>Digital Developments</b> within the University was received from the Pro Vice Chancellor, including an update on the functionality and development of Beacon (the University’s AI app).</p>

	<p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Glenn Earlam commended the developments showcased in the presentation and asked about the process for lecture feedback. Members discussed the further potential development of the app. In relation to the recent pilot on lecture ratings, Martin Jones noted that at the June meeting, the Board would receive a paper on the academic assurance eco-system, which would give a broader, more holistic picture of the position with this.</li> <li>• Colin Hughes asked about measuring the success of digital services/interventions such as Beacon. Andrew Proctor noted that there were metrics in place but that the exceptional nature of the last 12 months meant that it was difficult to compare on a like-for-like basis.</li> </ul>
2735	<p>The Board received for discussion the <b>Draft Report and Conclusions of Internal Review of Compliance with OfS Consumer Protection Conditions of Registration BG/120/20</b>, introduced by the Chief Operating Officer. The following main points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In January, the OfS requested that the University undertake a review during the first half of the spring term of its compliance with consumer law, and provide assurance to the Board of Governors of ongoing compliance with condition C1 (guidance on consumer protection law). (This followed the guidance note for providers from 10 June 2020 that all providers must be clear for new and returning students about how teaching and assessment would be delivered in 2020-21.)</li> <li>• The requested review was to undertake three key actions, detailed in the report.</li> <li>• 35 (out of 926) programmes were identified by Schools as having had material changes and further detail was sought on each one to provide clarity on whether ongoing compliance was at risk. After reviewing the information put forward by Schools, it was concluded that no programmes were currently non-compliant with the OfS CMA Guidance.</li> <li>• The report provided a summary of the review and was presented for the Board to approve.</li> <li>• It was noted that the report was confidential, containing legally privileged advice on the University's contractual arrangements with its students and other aspects of its compliance with consumer law and CMA Guidance.</li> </ul> <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <p>NONE</p>
2736	<p>The Board received for approval a proposal on <b>Pensions</b>, presented by the Chief Operating Officer. The paper covered the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The background to pensions at the University (including its legal obligations)</li> <li>• The current position both at Staffordshire and within the sector</li> <li>• An overview of next-step options and greater detail on these</li> <li>• A proposed approach for Phase Two and Phase Three</li> </ul> <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hannah Gibbard queried a potential issue with attracting suitable candidates (e.g. particularly from an NHS or other public sector background). Ian Blachford confirmed this had been considered as part of the process and noted that although there was a perception that a TPS pension scheme was a key attraction to candidates, some (particularly younger candidates) would appreciate the flexibility given by the proposals. Ian further noted that the current pension scheme did not in fact work for everyone (only around 40% of teaching staff joining the University continued with TPS). There was also the possibility that exceptions, akin to market supplements, could be made at the University's discretion, if this became an issue to attracting exceptional talent. Martin Jones further noted that anyone transferring in from USS (which was currently in crisis) would be able to freeze their pension in that pot, and this flexibility could potentially be marketed as a benefit for these staff.</li> <li>• Hannah Gibbard asked about the security of current TPS pension pots. Ian Blachford confirmed that nothing paid in to date was affected by the proposals by current staff, nor for future staff who had previously contributed to the scheme.</li> <li>• Colin Hughes commended the University's forward-thinking position on pensions, an area that many HEIs were reluctant to address in a proactive way.</li> </ul> <p>The pensions proposal was approved to move to consultation, with a further update on the consultation outcomes at the next meeting of the Board, where a final decision would be made in the light of these.</p>
2737	<p>The Board received for discussion the <b>Update on the Appointment of the Next Vice Chancellor</b>, introduced by the Chief Operating Officer, including an overview of the projected timeline.</p> <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Colin Hughes noted that Perrett Laver, the search agency, had highlighted the consistency of responses received from stakeholders.</li> </ul>

<b>4 FOR INFORMATION</b>	
2738	The <b>Students' Union Report</b> BG/120/19 was received for information.
2739	The <b>*Draft Academic Board Minutes: 10 March 2021 (Unconfirmed)*</b> BG/120/20 were received for information.
2740	The report on <b>Academic freedom/free speech in universities (letter from SoS 16 Feb 2021)</b> BG/120/21 was received for information.
<b>5 ADDITIONAL MATTERS</b>	
2741	<p><b>How have we made a positive impact on our students today?</b></p> <p>It was agreed that the steps to ensure that the University's pensions arrangements remained financially sustainable were key to continued success, along with digital developments to continuously improve the student experience.</p>
2742	<p><b>Any additional matters</b></p> <p>a) The Vice Chancellor informed the Board that following careful consideration, the Board of Governors Strategic Event planned for May 2021 would be postponed to a date in August (to be determined), which could potentially include the incoming Vice Chancellor. It was further proposed that the 30 June 2021 Board meeting be extended to include a strategy session and, if possible, a tour of the Catalyst building.</p>
2743	<b>Next meeting:</b> Wednesday 30 June 2021 (Boardroom, University House)