

MINUTES

BOARD OF GOVERNORS, BG-122

Date: Wednesday 22 September 2021

Time: 1500

Location: Boardroom, University House/online Microsoft Teams meeting

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.

Members		
Professor Liz Barnes	Vice Chancellor	P
Hannah Blackburn	Student Governor (President, Students' Union)	P
Jonathan Chapman	External Member	P (T)
Glenn Earlam	External Member	P (T)
Tony Evans	External Member	P (T)
Hannah Gibbard	Staff Governor (professional support staff)	A
Kevin Gould	External Member	P
Colin Hughes (Chair)	External Member	P
Baljinder Kuller	External Member	P
Dr Simon Smith	Staff Governor (academic staff)	P (T)
Jonathan Vardon	External Member	P (T)
Anthony Wallace	Student Governor (Vice President, Students' Union)	P
Sara Williams	External Member	P
In attendance		
Ian Blachford	Chief Operating Officer and Clerk to the Board of Governors	IA
Professor Martin Jones	Deputy Vice Chancellor	IA
Dr Annabel Kiernan	Pro Vice Chancellor - Education	IA
Sally McGill	Chief Financial Officer	IA
Ian Munton	Director of Library & Student Services (<i>Know Your Business session only</i>)	IA
Andrew Proctor	Pro Vice Chancellor - Digital	IA
Lauren Rooke	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

Know Your Business session, 1500 – 1530: A presentation on Mental Health and Student Suicide was received from Ian Munton, Director of Library and Student Services.

Members commented as follows:

- Discussion focused on common themes and triggers for students and how to effectively monitor this and provide further support (including potentially through the Beacon app), the importance of engagement with students, their families and the wider community, the data available to students on these statistics and rates, and how the Board could assist further. It was agreed that this was a crucial area of work and Liz Barnes thanked Ian Munton for his commitment to this, noting that he was due to leave the University shortly.

1 MEETING MANAGEMENT																			
2767	Apologies for Absence were received from Hannah Gibbard.																		
2768	There were no new Declarations of Interest .																		
2769	<p>The following Membership of the Board of Governors for 2021/22 was noted:</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: left; width: 25%;">Constitution</th> <th style="text-align: left;">Membership</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>External Members</td> <td>Jonathan Chapman Glenn Earlam Tony Evans Kevin Gould Colin Hughes (Chair) Baljinder Kuller Jonathan Vardon (Deputy Chair) Sara Williams VACANCY X 2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Student Governors</td> <td>Hannah Blackburn (President, Students' Union) Anthony Wallace (Vice President, Students' Union)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Staff Governors</td> <td>Dr Simon Smith (Academic Staff governor) Hannah Gibbard (Professional Support governor)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Vice Chancellor</td> <td>Professor Liz Barnes</td> </tr> <tr> <td>In attendance</td> <td>Ian Blachford, Chief Operating Officer & Clerk to the Board Professor Martin Jones, Deputy Vice Chancellor Dr Annabel Kiernan, Pro Vice Chancellor - Education Sally McGill, Chief Financial Officer & Deputy Chief Executive Andrew Proctor, Pro Vice Chancellor – Digital</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2">Co-opted Committee Members for 2021-22:</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Mohit Dhingra</td> <td>Audit and Risk Committee</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Mike Herbert</td> <td>Sustainability and Resources Committee</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Constitution	Membership	External Members	Jonathan Chapman Glenn Earlam Tony Evans Kevin Gould Colin Hughes (Chair) Baljinder Kuller Jonathan Vardon (Deputy Chair) Sara Williams VACANCY X 2	Student Governors	Hannah Blackburn (President, Students' Union) Anthony Wallace (Vice President, Students' Union)	Staff Governors	Dr Simon Smith (Academic Staff governor) Hannah Gibbard (Professional Support governor)	Vice Chancellor	Professor Liz Barnes	In attendance	Ian Blachford, Chief Operating Officer & Clerk to the Board Professor Martin Jones, Deputy Vice Chancellor Dr Annabel Kiernan, Pro Vice Chancellor - Education Sally McGill, Chief Financial Officer & Deputy Chief Executive Andrew Proctor, Pro Vice Chancellor – Digital	Co-opted Committee Members for 2021-22:		Mohit Dhingra	Audit and Risk Committee	Mike Herbert	Sustainability and Resources Committee
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Mohit Dhingra	Audit and Risk Committee																		
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2770	The Minutes of the last meeting of the Board of Governors , 30 June 2021 BG/122/01a and 29 July 2021 BG/122/1b, were confirmed as true and accurate records.																		
2771	<p>Matters arising:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Events – it was noted that the strategic events had taken place on 30 June 2021 and 24 August 2021, and that notes from these were included in the papers (BG-122-02a and BG-122-02b). 																		
2 STRATEGIC OVERVIEW																			
2772	<p>The Board of Governors received a report on Strategic Developments and Organisational Performance BG/122/03 from the Vice Chancellor, comprising sections on external context (including current OfS and DfE consultations), University performance (including recent awards), University business (including the recent restructure of the Schools) and changes within senior staffing. The Vice Chancellor highlighted the recent cabinet reshuffle's impact on the sector and the University's recent move to a three-School structure.</p> <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colin Hughes asked for clarification regarding Michele Donelan's portfolio, and it was agreed that this would be clarified once more detail was known from Government. • Martin Jones noted that the Vice Chancellor of Sunderland, David Bell, had been asked to lead a review of the ESFA. • Jonathan Vardon noted the recent movements in league tables cited in the Vice Chancellor's report, from a potential marketing standpoint. Liz Barnes highlighted that the data currently being used in the league tables used old graduate employment data from 2017-18 and 2018-19, and the marketing priority should be to highlight the positive employment stories. (Following her recent visit to the campus, Justine Greening had asked for details of these case studies, so she could present them to government.) 																		
3 FOR DISCUSSION AND/OR APPROVAL (marked below accordingly)																			

2773	<p>The Board of Governors received for discussion the Student Recruitment Update 2021-22 BG/122/04, introduced by the Pro Vice Chancellor – Education. The following main points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearing this year had been slower than expected, both at Staffordshire and across the wider sector, with a myriad of factors impacting on application rates, including higher grades, increasing deferral rates, and the impact of the pandemic on young people’s decision-making. • On-campus clearing applications were currently down 32.2% on the same point last year, 506 compared to 746. • On the current trajectory, we expected to recruit an additional 82 students to the close of clearing, reducing our gap to target from 379 to 297. • At 14 September, the Staffordshire University Home/EU undergraduate on campus recruitment position was 2875 firm acceptances against an enrolment target of 3147. Based on predictive modelling, a total of 2850 enrolments were anticipated at the end of cycle, if the current trajectory continued and firm to enrolment conversion was consistent with previous performance. • The PG/PGCE Home/EU position was 530 firm acceptances against an enrolment target of 847 enrolments. Based on predictive modelling, a total of 469 enrolments was anticipated at the end of the cycle. The international recruitment picture across UG and PG was positive with 339 deposits received against a combined target of 163 enrolments. • The recruitment cycle for the 2021-2022 academic year had been unique, unpredictable and turbulent. Teacher assessed grading and the aftermath of COVID had resulted in significant shifts to applicant behaviour and choice and were reflected in our recruitment position as we neared the conclusion of the cycle. A full and comprehensive de-brief was scheduled for October, which would allow us to further gather insight. <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colin Hughes commended the progress on international applications, noting that this was a difficult recruitment cycle and would be unpredictable regarding international enrolments. • Liz Barnes highlighted that there was widespread concern amongst families in the current climate about taking on University-fee levels of debt which was having an impact on the mature learner recruitment. • Hannah Blackburn noted that she had expected postgraduate recruitment levels to be higher this year and Liz Barnes agreed that this was surprising but may relate to the cost of living during such studies within a difficult economic climate. • Jonathan Vardon commended the positive momentum on SU:L’s progress and asked for clarification on the shortfall. Annabel Kiernan noted that a number of the universities around SU:L had taken on additional capacity, meaning there was a lot of pressure in the sector. Liz Barnes added that some institutions were paying students to defer, which would lead to an increased financial burden. Jonathan Chapman asked whether Staffordshire was in a position to exploit any of this. Liz Barnes confirmed that Russell Group HEIs were predicting lower levels of retention, which was likely to have a positive trickle-down effect on post-92s if these students wished to continue their studies elsewhere. • Sara Williams asked about the implication of the Lifetime Skills Guarantee, and strategy around this. Liz Barnes confirmed that this wasn’t expected to be introduced fully until 2026 and the mode of delivery had not yet been determined. The University had bid to be part of a short courses pilot, and was entering into a partnership with private provider Achieve Training. Through the LEP it would be working on improving relationships with local employers. (A paper on expanding the portfolio offer would come to the next Academic Board.)
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2775	<p>The Board of Governors received for discussion the report on the Draft Financial Outturn of 2020-21 (including Management Accounts to year end 31 July 2021) BG/122/06, presented by the Chief Financial Officer & Deputy Chief Executive. The following main points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [REDACTED] <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <p>NONE</p>
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2776	<p>The Board of Governors received for approval the Draft Budget 2021/22 BG/122/07, presented by the Chief Financial Officer & Deputy Chief Executive. The following main points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The paper set out the draft budget for 2021/22 and strategic financial plan through to 2025/26.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was growth planned for all years. Provisions against tuition fee income had been kept at the same level for all years at £5m in total, but the split had changed, compared to the budget for 2020-21, with a larger provision against UG provision and a smaller provision against apprenticeships. This reflected the current perceived risk of each income type. • The operating surplus had been set at 5% for 2021/22 onwards, however this assumed that permanent savings would be made in order to achieve this. • Staff costs remained in the range 52-53% of income across the time horizon, which was acceptable. Operating cash generated remained good, and it was assumed that year-end liquidity was maintained at £25m to protect the cash position and to ensure compliance with the OfS's liquidity measure. The plans as presented passed the University's bank covenant tests, with good headroom. A detailed pack for the budget and strategic financial plan was included as Appendix B. • A full walkthrough comparing the actuals for 2020/21 and the budget for 2021/22 is included as Appendix A. <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <p>NONE</p> <p>The Board of Governors approved the Draft Budget 2021/22 and strategic financial plan through to 2025/26.</p>
2777	<p>The Board of Governors received for approval the report on LIBOR Transition Strategy BG/122/08, presented by the Chief Financial Officer & Deputy Chief Executive. The following principal points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On the 5 March 2021, the UK Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) announced that all GBP LIBOR settings would either cease to be provided by any administrator or would no longer be representative immediately after 31 December 2021. The Bank of England's Working Group on Sterling Risk-Free Rates (BoE RFR WG) had recommended SONIA as the alternative benchmark. This change only potentially affected the University's two term loans with Lloyds TSB, totalling £50m, which provided funding for the University's capital programme. The University had been working on a proposal to transition its loan agreements from referencing LIBOR to SONIA as interest rates for potential costs and charges. • The University had engaged Ernst Young to review the proposal and its loan agreements with Lloyds to understand the current documented LIBOR fall back / replacement language and compile a short report outlining the background, the implications of the proposal and relevant details, and a recommendation on the most appropriate transition strategy. The report findings were summarised in the paper and the next steps were as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The University have advised Lloyds that the key terms of the Transition Proposal were appropriate, subject to Board of Governors approval. Lloyds would produce a draft Transition Agreement in early September 2021 ○ The University would review the documentation changes outlined in the Transition Agreement using advice from Ernst and Young and its internal Legal team. ○ The University would sign the Transition Agreement before the 30 September 2021, following the Board of Governors approval on the 22 September 2021. ○ Transition on the cessation of LIBOR using the lookback approach and a CAS calculated on the Five Year Historical Median Approach on the 31 December 2021. • It was recommended that the University accept Lloyds' Transition Proposal to transition its term loan agreements from LIBOR to SONIA, as outlined above and signed the Transition Agreement before 30 September 2021. <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Board of Governors discussed the proposal and having considered the documentation, approved the transition proposal outlined in the documentation, replacing LIBOR with Sterling Overnight Index Average (SONIA). The Board further authorised Liz Barnes and Sally McGill to sign the necessary documentation, including the Transition Agreement, on behalf of Staffordshire University. <p>The Board of Governors approved the proposal as detailed above.</p>
2778	<p>The Board of Governors received for discussion the report on Student Satisfaction Report 2021 BG/122/09, presented by the Pro Vice Chancellor – Education. The following main points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This report set out results from the 2021 National Student Satisfaction Survey (NSS), Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES), the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) and the University's own Student Viewfinder Survey (SVS) for UG students. • This was the first year where all four surveys were significantly impacted by the Covid pandemic. The headlines were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ National Student Survey: The University had achieved a positive outcome for NSS, despite declines in overall performance across all HEIs, as we had maintained our position relative to the sector. In terms of our external narrative therefore, we had retained a positive NSS outcome and our smaller cohort courses had performed well across all indicators.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Our internal discussion of NSS however is that our larger cohort courses had performed less well and clearly this impacted the University overall score, and therefore potentially league table performance, more so than the smaller course areas which had maintained or improved their NSS outcomes this year. Our larger cohort courses in key areas of DTA and HSC had been disappointing and could be understood to result from two core factors: a lack of access to specialist facilities and resources on campus (GVE) and a lack of placement opportunities in HSC. Both factors resulted from the pandemic, and both had had a significant deleterious impact on the student experience. ○ Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES): This year had seen a significant improvement in the University's performance compared with the sector and last year. Our overall satisfaction rate of 85% this year was 5% higher than last year and 7% higher than the sector rate of 78%. We ranked in the top ten of 88 institutions in four of the key measures: Overall Experience, Teaching and Learning, Assessment and Feedback and Organisation. The University remained above the sector rate in all of the key measures apart from Resources. In terms of the KPI – "Every course will be in top 50% in either the National Student Survey (NSS) or the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES)", for 2021, 8 out of 9 subject areas are in the top 50%. Postgraduate provision will be included in the continuous monitoring process noted above and is likely to be rolled out in January 2022. ○ Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES): Similar to the PTES results, the University had shown significant marked improved performance in PRES compared with last year and the sector in all of the key areas with the exception of Research Culture, Professional Development and Support. Our overall satisfaction rate of 84% this year was 10% higher than last year and 5% higher than the sector. However, it was just below our KPI measure of 85%. We ranked in the top ten of institutions in two of the measures: Professional Development and Resources. ○ Student View Finder Survey (SVS): We had experienced a reduction in satisfaction across the five key measures (Overall Satisfaction, Teaching On My Course, Assessment & Feedback, Academic Support and Proud To Be Staffs) compared with 2020. Significant reductions have been experienced relating to Learning Resources, Learning Community and Course Delivery. LSE saw the largest decrease of overall course satisfaction from last year. The decrease can be attributed to significant falls in satisfaction rates in Sport and Physical Exercise (down 28.2% from to 62.9% (22/35)) and Psychology (down 12% on last year to 81.1% (137/169)). Both departments saw significant falls in questions relating to Learning Resources, Learning Community and Course Delivery. Response rate has increased from 27.2% last year to 29.9%. ● In 2020-21 the University allowed for a range of student voice mechanisms to be used locally by course teams. From this academic year the University will return to consistent implementation of EvaSys in all course areas, providing additional support on use of the data by course directors and additional senior oversight on the outcomes as lead indicators for NSS performance. <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Jonathan Chapman asked about the proposed actions around this. Annabel Kiernan confirmed that a range of interventions were underway and that a deeper report would come to Strategy & Performance Committee. ● Liz Barnes highlighted the significant emphasis being put on oversight of courses with Course Directors. ● Hannah Blackburn asked about direct communication with course reps and departmental reps. Annabel Kiernan confirmed that we would be moving to the EvaSys survey as well as ensuring open direct communication with course and departmental reps. ● Kevin Gould asked how about movements intra-year could be monitored, Annabel Kiernan confirmed that this was the remit of Strategy & Performance Committee, where she would review what information was presented when, to keep the Committee informed.
2779	<p>The Board of Governors received for discussion the report on the Guardian University Guide 2022 update BG/122/10, presented by the Pro Vice Chancellor – Education. The following principal points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Staffordshire was now ranked 72nd out of 121 institutions, down 17 places from 55th in the new edition of the Guardian League Table (2022). The compilers of the Guardian League table had made a number of changes to the methodology for the new edition mainly to reflect the perceived impact of the pandemic: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The NSS results were aggregated with 2020 results and the weighting reduced from 25% to 20%. ○ Due to the delayed availability of Graduate Outcomes and the perceived impact of the pandemic on graduate employment rates, the 2017/18 Graduate Outcomes data (based on outcomes of students commencing in 2015/16) has been used for a second year rather than 2018/19. ○ The Continuation metric was increased from 10% to 15% of the overall scoring (to replace the drop in the NSS) ● There had been significant shift in the sector within the Value-Added metric. This was due to large rises in good degrees, with the sector increasing by over 5% and 21 institutions seeing their good degree percentage increase by over 10%. Conversely, Staffordshire University had seen a drop in this metric, due to a below sector average rise in good degrees, coupled with an increase in entry tariff.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The University had four subjects within the top 10 of their subject league table (Social Policy 4th and Fashion 5th, Design and Crafts 5th and Journalism, Publishing & Public Relations 8th), six in total in the top quartile, and a further six subjects in the bottom quartile of their respective league table (up from three in 2021). <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liz Barnes underlined that the University still had a significant way to go to achieve its target in the GUG, despite improvements in NSS data (broadly due to our partners performing better than last year). The University continued to work to drive up its performance. Martin Jones highlighted that work was underway to look to use the employability framework to effectively influence our own data. Sara Williams asked about the most significant impacts upon the league table. Liz Barnes clarified that retention, graduate outcomes, and student experience were the areas of focus. Colin Hughes highlighted that NSS “quality of teaching on my course” was a highly useful metric. Discussion continued around how this information could help improve decision-making processes.
2780	<p>The Board of Governors received for approval the report on Collaborative Academic Provision Register BG/122/11, presented by the Pro Vice Chancellor – Education. The following main points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The attached Register of Collaborative Provision was an up-to-date and authoritative record of Staffordshire University’s collaborative academic partnerships and apprentice employers. The data provided detailed the partners, courses and student numbers as of August 2021, with additional new partners and courses added which would be commencing in the Academic Year 2021/22. (An external version of this, without student number details, would be published on the University website.) The Board was asked to approve the Register as the definitive list of collaborative academic partnerships and the courses delivered in partnership. <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It was noted that a discussion item on the position with collaborative academic partnerships, and future development, would come to the next meeting of Strategy & Performance Committee. <p>The Board of Governors approved the Collaborative Academic Provision Register 2021-22.</p>
2781	<p>The Board of Governors received for discussion the report on Main Themes from Business Reviews BG/122/12, presented by the Vice Chancellor. The following key points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This paper summarised the key themes and reflections from the business reviews held in 2020/21. As the Board was aware, Executive held regular business reviews of each School and Service to be assured that progress was being made by each area towards the institutional strategic priorities agreed at the start of the year. They were data-led meetings and offered an opportunity to deep dive into performance in a way that was not otherwise possible: by doing so, a degree of root cause analysis could be undertaken to pinpoint where barriers to progress needed immediate resolution or where opportunities existed to improve performance. Four meetings were held in 2020/21. The meetings in the Winter, late Spring and mid-Summer were ‘full’ business reviews that had broad agendas and full Executive attendance. Following the arrival of the new Executive Director of Academic and Strategic Planning, however, the early Spring meetings were refocused specifically around School student number plans over the next three to five years and their forecasted recruitment position for 2021/22. <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liz Barnes reminded the Board that the Board Effectiveness Review process in 2020 had highlighted this as an area in which Governors would like to know more. Going forward, business reviews would be more effectively aligned in terms of School/Service progress and the overall five-year strategy.
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5 FOR INFORMATION

2783 The Board of Governors received for information the **Students’ Union Report** BG/122/14, introduced by the President of the Students’ Union. The report covered the following areas:

- NSS results
- Strategic plan for the year ahead
- Budget
- Covid Support Fund
- Green Impact Excellence Standard
- Proud to be Staffs Awards
- Broader Issues

Members and attendees commented as follows:

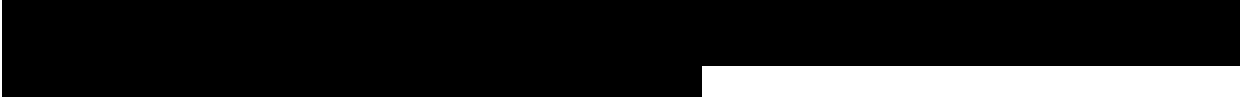
- Hannah Blackburn highlighted that the Union had received negative feedback from some students over perceived lack of timetabled learning. Annabel Kiernan confirmed that the Student Support team had been working extensively to help resolve these issues, some of which resulted from misreading of timetable information.
- Hannah Blackburn further noted that the Students’ Union had also received a number of enquiries about graduation, with Annabel Kiernan clarifying that the dates would be confirmed ASAP, now that final decisions on logistics had been clarified.
- Anthony Wallace noted that it was likely that the substantial Covid Support Fund distributed to students in need had been a factor in the recent improved NSS results.

2784 The Board of Governors received for information the report on **Apprenticeships Performance** BG/122/15, introduced by the Chief Financial Officer & Deputy Chief Executive, who noted the following:

- Apprenticeship provision at the University had performed strongly in 20/21. The final ILR report for the academic year recorded income from the ESFA of over £10m with 2033 apprentices recruited since September 2017, 1008 in the 20/21 academic year. 743 (76.3%) enrolments for this period were on the Police Constable Degree Apprenticeships (PCDA). This rate of growth, mostly due to the PCDA, would not continue but enrolment numbers were expected to consolidate as other apprenticeships grow.
- The forecast budget for 20/21 was £9.5m for the year. This had been exceeded and after reconciliation by the ESFA in October 2021, is likely to be in excess of £10m. This income includes, as well as payment for delivery, employer incentive payments, achievement payments, additional support and English and Maths.
- The paper gave an update on the position with forecast numbers and enrolment in 21/22, performance data and analysis, Covid-19 impact, Ofsted inspection, ESFA and sub-contracting audit, future developments, developments in the apprenticeship sector, and degree apprenticeship consultation.

2785 The Board of Governors received for information the ***Calendar of Corporate and Public Events 2021/22*** BG/122/16.

6 ADDITIONAL MATTERS

2786	How have we made a positive impact on our students today? It was agreed that Board-level discussions around student mental health/suicide were crucial, as well as discussions around Stafford accommodation.
2787	Any additional matters: a) 
2788	Next meeting: Tuesday 23 November 2021 (Moat House, Acton Trussell)