

MINUTES

BOARD OF GOVERNORS, BG-132

Date: Wednesday 10 April 2024

Time: 14:30

Location: CA105/6, Catalyst, Leek Rd

Notes:

1. *Items marked with an asterisk (starred items) are for information only or regarded as noncontentious. Starred items will not be discussed and will be assumed to have been noted or approved unless a request to unstar a named item is received from a Board member in advance, or at the commencement, of the meeting.*
2. *Items classified as Confidential, and their subsequent minutes, will be redacted before publication of the agenda and minutes on the University's public website.*

Know Your Business Session, 14:30 – 15:00: Understanding University League Tables. A session was delivered by Professor Kevin Hetherington, Deputy Vice Chancellor summarising the University's current position in the major UK league tables and their importance in enabling the University to identify differential performance.

Kim Newell Chebator asked if there was a proven correlation between certain league tables and recruitment performance. Professor Hetherington responded that whilst they were consulted by potential applicants the league tables tend to be a lower importance source for domestic applicants of post 92 universities (compared to say Russell Group where they are significant). However, a presence in the QS World Ranking was significant for attracting overseas applications. He added that league tables are also useful in providing important metrics to help the University monitor and improve the quality of its education.

Discussion ensued on potentially working with an external group to help improve league table performance. Kevin Hetherington explained that the financial implications of outsourcing are currently preventative, however the University has the expertise to manage this internally.

Martin Pugh asked if there was an inverse relationship between league table performance and widening access. Kevin Hetherington explained that there was a tension between league table performance and access, for example, tariff upon entry.

Olayemi Ajiteru asked about potentially collaborating with international alumni to improve its world rankings. Kevin Hetherington confirmed that those who have coauthored with the University in the past are already approached and that an exercise to identify international academics amongst the alumni is also being considered.

Len Stuart asked about the University's approach to improving in areas where the metrics are low. Kevin Hetherington explained that specific reasons impacting performance are analysed in such cases, and actions identified to improve performance.

Members		
Olayemi Ajiteru	Student Governor (President, Students' Union)	P
Gemma Brierley	External Member	P(T)
Jonathan Chapman (Chair)	External Member	P
Mohit Dhingra	External Member	P
Kevin Gould	External Member	P
Professor Chris Headleand	Staff Governor (academic staff)	A
Colin Hughes	External Member	P(T)
Professor Martin Jones	Vice Chancellor	P
Baljinder Kuller	External Member	P
Josie Morris	External Member	P
Eleanor Morrissey	External Member	P

Martin Pugh	External Member	P
Kim Newell Chebator	External Member	P
Juliet Oosthuysen	External Member	A
Leonard Stuart	Student Governor	P
In attendance		
Ian Blachford	Chief Operating Officer and Clerk to the Board of Governors	IA
Dr Annabel Kiernan	Pro Vice Chancellor - Education	IA
Professor Kevin Hetherington	Deputy Vice Chancellor	IA
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	
2888	Apologies for Absence were received from Juliet Oosthuysen and Professor Chris Headleand. Members welcomed Josie Morris and Eleanor Morrissey and Gemma Brierley to their first formal scheduled meeting of the Board of Governors.
2889	Declarations of Interest Ian Blachford stated that he is a member of LGPS, when the item on pensions was discussed.
2890	Minutes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Last meeting of the Board of Governors, 28 November 2023 BG/132/01 • Extraordinary meeting (Branding), 22 January 2024 BG/132/02 • Resolution of the Board (Sandycroft Holdings), 15 February 2024, BG/132/03 • Extraordinary meeting (Student Village), 22 March 2024 BG/132/04 <p>The minutes were all approved.</p>
2891	Matters arising: <p>Minute 2860 - Annual Quality and Standards and Student Success Report – the summary of the report proceeded to Strategy and Performance Committee on 21 February 2024 and appears on the agenda, for approval.</p> <p>Minute 2862 – Chancellor – an update report on the appointment of a new Chancellor appears as a separate paper on this agenda.</p> <p>Minute 2862 – Governor Appointed from the Professional Services – to note that Saima Hussain had resigned and the decision on her replacement appears elsewhere on the agenda.</p> <p>Minute 2865 – Budget and Expenditure Reduction – the Board would be provided with an update on the delivery of the in-year budget savings under the item referred through from Sustainability and Resources Committee.</p> <p>Minute 2871 – Prevent – The OfS had confirmed that the prevent annual return had been accepted and there were no issues arising from this on 12th March 2024.</p> <p>Minute 2880 - Student Village project - The extraordinary Board meeting on 22 March approved the progression of the Student village Project. A verbal update on progress since that date will be provided at this meeting.</p>
2 STRATEGIC OVERVIEW	
2892	The Strategic Developments Report BG/132/05 was introduced for discussion by Vice Chancellor Martin Jones. Since the Board’s last meeting in November, the external landscape for HE has been shaped by developments in the following: high profile HE legal cases, freedom of speech, international student recruitment, the budget and the next General Election, franchising, UCAS January deadline 2024, research bureaucracy and the OfS Approach to Public grant funding. <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p>

- Jonathan Chapman commended the University for its gender pay gap attainment as well as for the awards it had received as highlighted in the report.
- Jonathan Chapman asked about the University's policy on freedom of speech given recent developments. Martin Jones explained that a 3rd consultation is taking place imminently and that the policy will be rewritten in line with OfS regulatory requirements. He confirmed that there had been no issues to date at the university.
- Josie Morris asked if intelligence was available on policy changes should there be a change of government. Martin Jones responded that he regularly engages in policy discussions when leveraging the network of shadow advisors at organised events such as those hosted by Million Plus. He added that sources suggest around 75% of universities within the sector are implementing similar strategies to those at the University in order to tackle sector challenges.
- Gemma Brierley inquired about the University's strategic approach in light of the anticipated incoming new government. It was agreed to include this topic on the agenda at the Strategic Event scheduled for 27 June.
- Baljinder Kuller noted that degree apprenticeships had taken some time to come to maturity and that even if they are affected by policy changes with a change of government, there will likely be a delay before businesses adjust their approach. Raheel Nawaz concurred, noting that the public sector's response would not be immediate and the implementation of stackable training would take some time to fully integrate.

There were no further comments and the report was noted.

3 SUB-COMMITTEE BRIEFING SHEETS AND REFERRED ITEMS

2893 BRIEFING SHEET - Strategy and Performance Committee, 21 Feb 2024 BG/132/06

The contents of the Briefing Sheet from the Strategy and Performance Committee were noted and the following matters were considered:

For Approval

a) **Minute 393** - Annual Quality and Standards and Student Success Report 2022-2023 Summary BG/132/07

Members and attendees commented as follows:

- Jonathan Chapman commended the improved clarity of the report in this new format.
- Mohit Dhingra asked which of the actions in the report had the most impact and if we were on track with the actions. Annabel Kiernan explained that the challenge lies in ongoing work related to the student experience which is continuously monitored. The approach is to stay complaint while remaining agile. An update will be presented to the Board later in the year.
- Gemma Brierley asked about the frequency of the self-assessment and about measures to ensure continuous improvement. Annabel Kiernan responded that the self-assessment is conducted twice a year and that key metrics are analysed as part of the continuous improvement process.

The Annual Quality and Standards and Student Success report was approved.

b) **Minute 406** - Ofsted Self-Assessment Report and Quality Improvement Plan BG/132/08

Members and attendees commented as follows:

- Josie Morris asked about the correlation between KPI measurements and league table performance. Kevin Hetherington responded that the league tables tend to monitor traditional subjects, for example, few of the league tables provide measures on apprenticeship metrics. However, the University's own quality improvement plan helps with planning interventions to improve its apprenticeships provision, and these will be assessed again in 2028. Discussion ensued on whether apprenticeships should be included in league tables and Kevin Hetherington commented that this would benefit the University's position, however, this was not in the university's gift.
- Kevin Gould commended the report and stated that the University had made excellent progress in diversifying its apprenticeship provision in the last few years. Discussion ensued on the importance of apprenticeships within the University's portfolio and ensuring the University is ready to respond to future challenges due to political uncertainty.

The Ofsted Self-Assessment Report and Quality Improvement Plan were approved.

For Information

c) **Minute 395** - *KPI Scorecard BG/132/09

	The Scorecard was noted for information.
2894	<p>BRIEFING SHEET - Audit and Risk Committee, 13 March 2024 BG/132/10</p> <p>The contents of the Briefing Sheet from the Audit and Risk were noted and the following matters were considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kim Newell Chebator asked about the space utilisation audit report from a financial perspective and how it impacted decisions on other investments in space and resources. Raheel Nawaz commented that the audit highlighted that it was not just an issue of the available space, but also the functionality of the spaces, which often led to the underutilisation. • Discussion ensued on ensuring robust utilisation within the existing estate. Raheel Nawaz explained that the estate conditions report was underway, and this would inform the deployment of the future estate. This condition report would come back to the Sustainability and Resources Committee and would address some aspects of space utilisation. An update on progress on the issues raised in the adit would also return to the Audit and Risk Committee later in the year. <p>For Approval</p> <p>a) Minute 1990 – Review of Fraud Prevention Policies BG/132/11</p> <p>The policy was approved.</p> <p>b) Minute 1991 – Review of Public Interest Disclosure Policy BG/132/12</p> <p>The policy was approved.</p> <p>c) Minute 1993 – University-level Risk Registers BG/132/13</p> <p>The risk registers were approved.</p> <p>For Information</p> <p>d) Minute 1995 – Internal Audit Contract Extension BG/132/14</p> <p>The Internal Audit Contract Extension was noted.</p>
2895	<p>BRIEFING SHEET - Sustainability and Resources Committee, 20 March 2024 BG/132/15</p> <p>The contents of the Briefing Sheet from the Sustainability and Resources Committee were noted and the following matters were considered:</p> <p>For Approval</p> <p>a) Minute 607 – Proposed Disposal of Ex Crime Scene House BG/132/16</p> <p>The report was approved.</p> <p>b) Minute 608 - District Heat Network (DHN) Heads of Terms for a Draft Agreement BG/132/17</p> <p>The Heads of Terms Draft Agreement was approved.</p> <p>c) Minute 617 - Finance Strategy Update BG/132/18</p> <p>Sally McGill clarified that separately from this report, a 5 year plan with budget information, together with the Target Operating Model will be available in June.</p> <p>The Financial Strategy Update was approved.</p> <p>d) [REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p>

[REDACTED]

For Information

e) Minute 620 - Implementation of the Consultation Proposal to Address the In Year Financial Position BG/132/20

Members and attendees commented as follows:

- Discussion ensued on the timescales of the Target Operating Model and Sally McGill explained that it would be comprehensively in place by September in terms of the business case and implementation would be delivered thereafter. It was anticipated that some savings may be leveraged prior to the business case being finalised.
- Martin Pugh asked whether the target operating model is simply improving efficiency based on today's current model. Sally McGill explained that the approach is not to provide a more efficient version of existing services, rather the Target Operating Model is based on a future vision of the University and recalibrating services and spend to support this.
- Sally McGill explained that the plan is being cocreated with managers' input. Martin Pugh noted that this could inhibit creativity and ambition as they anticipate streamlining. It was noted that whilst they were engaged and needed to be so, there would be strict governance around how this would develop to ensure the optimum decisions were delivered.
- Eleanor Morrissey asked if outsourcing and offshoring were being considered in the new model. Sally McGill responded that this was not the case and that by restructuring and developing staff, all staffing needs would be met internally.

There were no further comments and the report was noted.

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

2896 The **Branding Update** BG/132/21 was introduced for discussion by Pro Vice Chancellor Academic, Annabel Kiernan following the brand project sign off by Board of Governors on 22 January 2024.

In February, we submitted our request to the Office for Students (OfS) to change university name to 'University of Staffordshire'. The OfS has responded to our request with three points of clarification around process, informing the Department for Education, and requesting market insight around whether the proposed name is misleading or confusing. This is a standard response. The paper presented provided an outline of the OfS process and timeline and provided an update on our implementation planning. The OfS has indicated that they anticipate the process taking approximately eight months. They will respond to us within two weeks following our last response submitted on 18 March 2024, with an update on next steps.

Members and attendees commented as follows:

- Martin Jones updated the Board that he had networked with neighbouring Vice Chancellors and that we were not expecting the name change request to be rejected.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kim Newell Chebator asked about the consequences of the name change not being approved in time for the next major recruitment cycle. It was explained that the project encompasses more than a name change, and that these would still continue to be deployed. <p>There were no further comments and the update was noted.</p>
2897	<p>The International Tuition Fee Policy 2025-2026 BG/132/22 was introduced by Vice Chancellor Kevin Hetherington. The report outlines the following proposals for approval.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The standard Undergraduate international tuition fee to remain at the 2024/25 rate of £16,750 The Nursing, Paramedic Science, ODP and Midwifery Undergraduate international tuition fee to remain at the 2024/25 rate of £19,000 The standard Postgraduate taught international tuition fee to remain at the 2024/25 rate of £16,750 The Postgraduate taught international tuition fee for the 2-year MSc (Nursing) to remain at £19,000 The Postgraduate taught international tuition fee for the 2-year MSc (Social Work) to increase from £16,750 to £19,000 due to the requirement for placements to be sought and provided in a similar way to the MSc (Nursing) The standard Postgraduate research international tuition fee to remain at £16,750 per year The "Smart Scholarship" tuition fee discount worth £3,000 to all self-funding international students for each year of study at the University to be maintained from 2024/25 to 2025/26 Fees for continuing international students would continue to be fee protected and not uplifted during their course registration. <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <p>Jonathan Chapman asked if the proposed fees had been benchmarked against the sector. Kevin Hetherington responded that The proposals are based on the analysis of the international tuition fees and scholarships of 137 UK HEIs and are calculated to place Staffordshire University around the market average for similar Million + / University Alliance institutions based on available fees at the time of consideration.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gemma Brierley asked if the University's duty of care commitment also extend to international students. Kevin Hetherington responded that this was the case, however cost of living support could not be offered to international students for legal reasons relating to visas. On a related note, Kevin Gould asked about international recruitment – are we still having same payment plan as part of fees. Sally McGill responded that instalments are spread over course and that the deposit situation is still the same. She explained that the paper is referring to the new fees from September 2025 and not about the instalment policy. <p>The paper was approved.</p>
2898	<p>The paper on the Appointment of the Governor Drawn from Professional Staff BG/132/23 was introduced by the Vice Chancellor Martin Jones for approval.</p> <p>As Saima Hussain left the University in April 2024, this created a vacancy for the Governor drawn from the professional support staff.</p> <p>As per the established procedure, nominations ran for four weeks and interviews were conducted via Teams, comprised of the Chair of the Board, Jonathan Chapman, Saima Hussain and the Vice Chancellor. Following these interviews, the panel recommended Marta Vizcaya Echano for appointment to the Board.</p> <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Colin Hughes commended the high standard of applicants and stated that this was an encouraging indicator of culture within the University. <p>There were no further comments and the Board approved the appointment of Marta Vizcaya Echano for the Professional Support Staff Governor role with immediate effect. This would now be communicated to staff.</p>
2899	<p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p>

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5 FOR INFORMATION

2900 **The Students' Union Report** BG/132/25 was introduced by the President of the Students Union, Olayemi Ajiteru who outlined key points.

Members and attendees commented as follows:

- Kim Newell Chebator asked about the Students Union's financial model. Len Stuart explained that 100% of its funding is from the University. Sally McGill commented that she is a Trustee of the Students Union and that it had adequate reserves to cover historic pension liabilities.
- Sally McGill explained that in the past the Students Union was commercially viable and financed itself through events and social activities. This has proven more difficult post Covid 19, however the Students Union continues to add value by providing employment and spaces to students. The Students Union also oversees the management of a lettings agency which is invaluable to students as it provides advice on their tenancy contracts.

There were no further comments and the report was noted.

2901 ***Academic Board minutes (unconfirmed): 19 March 2024 *** BG/132/26

The Academic Board Minutes were noted.

6 ADDITIONAL MATTERS

2902 **Any additional matters**
None

2903 **Next meetings:**
Extraordinary Meeting: Tues 30 April 10am on Microsoft Teams
Next scheduled meeting: Weds 26 June 2024 (CA105/6, Catalyst, Leek Rd)
Strategic event: Thurs 27 June 2024 (CA206/7/8, Catalyst Leek Rd)