

University of Lancashire

Unreserved Minutes of the Board Meeting Held on 6 February 2025 at 5.00pm in the Engineering and Innovation Centre (EIC) Boardroom, Preston Campus

Present:

Anne McCarthy (Chair)

Graham Baldwin
Jon Baldwin
Jim Carter
Luke Fitzgerald
Ridwanah Gurjee
Victoria Hutchinson
Lesley Lloyd

Ruth Lowry
Lorraine Norris
Khalil Rehman
Rachel Robins
Lindsay Robinson
Lis Smith*

Also in attendance:

Lisa Brooks (Governance and Compliance Manager)
George Charles (Chief Finance Officer)
Ruth Connor (Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Operations))
Heather Ellis (Director of Marketing) for Item 7/UB1289
Ian Fisher (University Secretary and General Counsel/Clerk to the Board)
Carolyn Johnson (Executive Officer to the Vice-Chancellor)
Ken Lee (Chief People Officer)
Fiona Winters (Head of Governance/Deputy Clerk to the Board)

*Via videoconference

UB1283. Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed all present, particularly Victoria Hutchinson and Rachel Robins who were attending their first meeting as newly appointed Independent Governors.

Apologies for absence had been received from Richard Frediani, Richard Hext and Fiona Rayment, whose written comments would be addressed during the meeting.

UB1284. Declaration of Interests

Ms Hutchinson highlighted a potential interest regarding the Burnley Campus, which the University Secretary undertook to address in line with the normal process.

There were no other declarations of interest in relation to any items on the agenda.

UB1285. Chair's Announcements

(i) Tour of the School of Pharmacy and Biomedical Sciences

The Chair thanked the Vice-Chancellor for arranging an impressive tour of facilities in the School of Pharmacy and Biomedical Sciences, including interactive presentations by staff and students. It had been enlightening to hear from the students and how the Open Day and the role of Student Ambassadors had influenced their decision to study at the University.

Members commended the strong leadership demonstrated by the Dean of School with support from her senior team, and the candid account of the School's journey to achieve GPhC re-accreditation for the next 6 years. It was also interesting to note how the School had consulted with central services to ensure effective communication with students during the accreditation process.

(ii) Five Areas of Focus

In her new role as Chair of the Board, Miss McCarthy reflected on the fast pace of change in the current environment and the vital role of the University in supporting the transformation of organisations and individuals. She outlined the following five areas which would be the focus of her tenure:

- (i) that we do the basics well;
- (ii) that we are financially stable;
- (iii) that we are focused on the long term through a refresh of the strategy;
- (iv) that we have the capability and capacity in the organisation to deliver that strategy; and
- (v) that we learn to execute at pace.

Meetings were taking place with members of the Vice-Chancellor's Group (VCG), staff, students and other stakeholders to identify the strategic questions that needed to be addressed, with the aim of building on the University's strong foundations and enabling it to thrive in the future.

UB1286. Reserved and Unreserved Minutes of the University Board Meeting held on 2 December 2024

The Reserved and Unreserved Minutes of the previous meeting held on 2 December 2024 were agreed as a true record.

UB1287. Matters Arising

The Chair reported that most matters were addressed within the reports by the Vice-Chancellor and the Chief Finance Officer or elsewhere on the agenda.

With reference to Minute UB1267, it was reported that the University's strategic key performance indicators had been mapped against the five priorities for Higher Education identified by the Secretary of State and a further update would be provided at the Board Residential in May.

UB1288. Vice-Chancellor's Report

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

In summarising his report, Professor Baldwin focused on areas of strategic significance or where there had been further updates since the time of writing, as follows:

(i) Financial Position of the Sector

The financial position of the sector remained precarious despite the tuition fee increase, which was largely offset by the rise in National Insurance contributions. Several universities had recently declared cost reduction exercises. The relative impact of the USS and TPS pension schemes was significant, since the University would be in a stronger financial position were it not for the disproportionately high costs associated with the latter. The current position indicated that the University was operating more efficiently than many pre 1992 universities and work was ongoing to further improve efficiency.

(ii) Freedom of Speech

The Government had confirmed that it intended to re-introduce the Higher Education Freedom of Speech Act, although in a revised form. The proposed changes included that complaints by staff and students would be dealt with by the Office for Students (OfS) and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) respectively.

(iii) Artificial Intelligence

Following the Government's response to the to the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Opportunities Action Plan, the University was engaged in extensive work to enhance its AI Strategy, with a focus on developing expertise in the utilisation and exploitation of the benefits of AI. This included embedding AI in the curriculum.

The Chair observed that this was a significant opportunity to facilitate collaboration across the University to leverage the benefits of AI, including for the advancement of research in the medical sciences. In welcoming this suggestion, Professor Baldwin confirmed that a specialist group had been convened to oversee a co-ordinated approach to the development of AI from an academic perspective and to facilitate efficiencies in professional services.

Dr Gurjee added that Schools were working closely with the Centre for Collaborative Learning (CCL) to explore how AI could be used to support inclusive approaches to teaching and learning.

(iv) *Convention of the North*

On 28 February 2025, the Convention of the North would be hosted by the University and chaired by our Chancellor, Ranvir Singh. The event which would bring together leading authorities from Government and across the region, promised to be a significant showcase for the University, Preston and Lancashire.

(v) *Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation*

Having supported the proposal for Lancashire Devolution, the University welcomed the establishment of the Combined County Authority and work towards becoming a mayoral authority. There were, however, some concerns about the proposed local government structure and the University would continue its endeavours to influence this.

(vi) *Reserved Minute – Text Redacted*

(vii) *Reserved Minute – Text Redacted*

(viii) *Reserved Minute – Text Redacted*

(ix) *Reserved Minute – Text Redacted*

(x) *Reserved Minute – Text Redacted*

(xi) *Reserved Minute – Text Redacted*

(xii) *Academic Update*

Good progress was being made to increase retention and reduce in-year withdrawals, due to the robust operation of SEAM Boards and increased integrated working between Schools and Student Support teams.

The National Student Survey (NSS) had been launched, and all Schools had plans in place to encourage students to provide feedback based on their positive experiences.

(xiii) *University of the Future*

Progress was being made towards establishing the University of the Future. Phase One of the Portfolio Review had been completed and the Curriculum Transformation Project had moved beyond the pilot phase.

A project was also underway to develop the 'block' learning model previously presented to the Board, to exploit the opportunities afforded by the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE).

(xiv) *News*

Professor Baldwin concluded by encouraging Board members to read the summary of news stories which included the reaction to the University's name change, BBC

Breakfast broadcasting live from the Student Centre, winter graduation success stories and a variety of expert comments on news topics.

The Chair thanked Professor Baldwin for his comprehensive report and invited comments from Board members.

Mrs Lloyd welcomed the integration of the Decarbonisation and Infrastructure Masterplans, and progress towards the achievement of 'net zero', noting that 'expressions of interest' had been invited to develop Energy Centres to provide heat and electricity to the University. Professor Baldwin confirmed that a report on these developments would be presented to a future meeting of the Board.

Resolved: That the Vice-Chancellor's Update Report be noted.

UB1289. University Name Change

Heather Ellis, Director of Marketing and Development, joined the meeting for this item.

A report entitled 'Proudly Changing to the University of Lancashire' was received from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, setting out the context and rationale for the decision to change the name of the institution to the 'University of Lancashire', which had been initiated in 2018 and approved by the Office for Students (OfS) in December 2024.

A comprehensive plan had been drawn up to ensure that the transition to the new name succeeded in strengthening the University's brand and reputation, increasing recruitment and ensuring compliance with regulatory obligations.

Ms Ellis, Director of Marketing and Development, delivered a presentation outlining the plan, and highlighted the following key points:

- (i) The change was primarily intended to reflect the University's location, civic responsibility and regional role more accurately, improve recruitment and recognition, particularly amongst prospective national and international students, and strengthen brand awareness.
- (ii) Crucially, the change of name did not alter the fundamental history, identity or ethos of the University.
- (iii) The OfS had attached several conditions to the approval decision, including the requirement to minimise confusion, particularly for prospective students, international audiences and those with disabilities, with active steps being taken to mitigate risks and ensure clear communication. It was planned to minimise confusion by aligning the campaign with key recruitment milestones.
- (iv) A strategic implementation group had been convened to oversee the change, supported by dedicated workstreams to manage operational and cultural shifts.
- (v) Three formal steps were required to affect the name change, namely, securing permission from Companies House which had now been done, enacting a Board resolution and lodging a 'reportable event' with the OfS.

(vi) A set of principles had been identified to ensure a sequenced, seamless transition across all areas of the University's business, building on existing strengths to increase brand awareness, with the aim of 'doing it once and doing it well'.

(vii) Reserved Minute – Text Redacted.

(viii) Reserved Minute – Text Redacted.

(ix) Reserved Minute – Text Redacted.

Reserved Minute - Text Redacted.

Resolved: Reserved Minute – Text Redacted.

UB1290. Reserved Minute – Text Redacted

UB1291. Reserved Minute – Text Redacted

UB1292. Gender Pay Gap

The Chief People Officer presented a report setting out the University's gender pay gap position for the 2023/24 academic year, a copy of which is included in the Minute Book.

The report set out how the University was required to publish gender pay information on an annual basis. The figures for 2023/24 showed that the median pay gap had increased whilst the mean gap continued to decline. Although publication of ethnicity and disability pay gap reporting was not compulsory at present, figures for both these characteristics had been included in the report for information.

Mr Lee clarified that the gender pay gap was distinct from equal pay where legislation ensured that men and women received the same pay for carrying out the same work. The gender pay gap was reflective of representation and designed to encourage the fair and equitable distribution of female and male colleagues across different roles in terms of seniority.

Whilst the University's position compared favourably with the national economy and the wider Higher Education sector, there was no room for complacency given the existence of and increase in the median gap. This was attributed to several factors, including the disproportionately high number of women employed in administrative roles below the median pay level, in relation to the number of men employed in higher paid specialist roles in areas such as LIS.

A significant proportion of women were employed in academic and other senior roles, notably 60% of the University's top-level professors were women. Whilst this

contributed to an increase in the total salaries paid to women and a decline in the mean gap, it did not materially affect the median position.

The actions which had been identified to address the median gap were closely linked with the ongoing work towards achieving Athena Swann accreditation, in seeking to ensure co-ordination and reduce duplication. Athena Swann was a charter mark awarded by Advance HE designed to acknowledge and accredit work towards greater gender equality.

The Board was asked to approve the gender pay gap figures for 2023/24 for publication and contribute feedback to support ongoing initiatives to close the gap.

Dr Robins explored whether there was any correlation between market supplement and the pay gap, noting that a lack of synchronisation could create a greater impact. Mr Lee responded that the market supplement had been reviewed two years ago and this linked to the increased supplement in areas such as LIS and Computing which commanded a higher salary in the private sector and where there was a prevalence of male employees.

Members observed that the Dean of the School of Pharmacy and Biomedical Sciences was an inspirational role model, supported by a management team comprising mainly female colleagues, and that it would be a worthwhile exercise to track how that position had been achieved.

Mr Carter initiated a discussion about the role of the University as both an employer and educator, in promoting opportunities for women in fields where they were currently under-represented, such as security, systems and engineering. Ms Robinson explained that Schools engaged in regular analysis of student data, with the aim of taking action to close identified gaps. In considering intersectionality, Dr Gurjee added that it was also important to enhance opportunities for women from minoritised ethnic groups.

The Chair welcomed all the points raised, noting that the launch of the University of Lancashire was a significant moment to promote opportunities for women from the county and beyond. She undertook to convey Dr Rayment's comments to Mr Lee, which referred to the need for clear messaging, highlighting the benefits of diversity of thought.

Resolved: That

- (i) the report be noted, and the gender pay gap figures for 2023/24 be approved for publication; and
- (ii) the current position on ethnicity and disability pay gap reporting be noted.

UB1293. Students' Union Report

The President of the Student's Union presented a report giving an update on projects within the Students' Union Strategy, along with the review of representation. A copy of the report is set out in the Minute Book.

In briefly summarising the report, Mr Fitzgerald highlighted the following:

- (i) Significant progress had been made with the national student housing campaign. An amendment had now been passed to the Renters' Rights Bill, whereby students would no longer be obliged to sign contracts more than 6 months in advance.
- (ii) Since its launch, the Essentials Hub had recorded 65 users, the majority of whom were mature students, many with dependents. Further work was underway to target this student demographic to support retention.
- (iii) A 'Speak Week' initiative had focused on gathering feedback from students about their wellbeing, with a view to translating this into positive action. A copy of the full report was set out in the appendix. Two further 'Speak Weeks' were planned to focus on the cost of studying and academic attainment.
- (iv) The recommended changes to the representation structures were being progressed. A full report would be presented to the next meeting of the Board to explain how the changes would provide much improved representation for all members of the Students' Union.

In thanking Mr Fitzgerald for his report, the Chair commended the important work on the Renters' Rights Bill, which protected students' interests.

With reference to the planned 'Speak Week' on academic achievement, Mr J Baldwin suggested that it was important to recognise that demanding workloads and deadlines were an intrinsic part of academic study, whilst acknowledging the trigger points where those demands could become overwhelming.

In response to an enquiry by Mrs Norris about the enduring impact of the pandemic on the way students learn and socialise, Mr Fitzgerald confirmed that the Vice President was involved in collaborative work with other universities to better understand this.

Whilst welcoming developments in relation to the women's gym space, members highlighted that it was important to maintain access to a range of facilities for all students, including squash courts.

In acknowledging the Students' Union involvement in the APP with the aim of increasing student attainment, Mr Rehman observed that it would be pertinent to distinguish between international and home students.

Members acknowledged the important work by the Students' Union to ensure that increasing numbers of students could access support, which was especially important for first generation and neuro diverse students.

The Chair formally noted the Board's recognition of the work of Mr Fitzgerald and the Students' Union and the high quality of the reports.

Resolved: That the Students' Union Report be noted.

UB1294. Governance Update

The University Secretary and General Counsel reported that extensive work was underway to address the recommendations arising from the Governance Effectiveness Review.

This included a review of the Instrument and Articles of Government which would also incorporate the new name, clarifying the role of the Audit Committee in relation to risk and ensuring best practice across a range of other areas.

A comprehensive report with a suite of supporting documents would be presented to the Governance, Risk and Nominations Committee in due course.

Resolved: That the Governance Update be noted.

UB1295. Resources Committee Update

Mr J Baldwin gave an oral update on the substantive items considered at the meeting of the Resources Committee held on 16 January 2025. A brief written summary of the meeting was available on the Teams site.

Many of the matters covered previously in the reports by the Vice-Chancellor and the Chief Finance Officer had been considered in depth, including UCLan Cyprus and the 5-Year Forecast and Capital Plan.

The Committee had also considered the potential implications arising from an identified error in the partial tax exemption adjustment for last year, and received assurances that steps were being taken to avoid a recurrence.

Resolved: That the Resources Committee Update be noted.

UB1296. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

UB1297. Date of the Next Meeting

The next meeting would take place on 10 April 2025 at 5.00pm, to be preceded by a tour.

Ian Fisher
Clerk to the Board