



BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Minutes of a meeting held at 12.00 noon on 20th September 2018 at Newton Park

Present:

Mr T Jagger (Chair)
Mr S Blake
Mr M Francis
Mr J Glasspool
Ms R Heald
Lady T Lloyd
Mr R Lucas
Mr I Mansfield

Prof P Martin
Dr S McMillan
Ms V Nawathe
Mr T Osborne
Prof S Rigby (Vice-Chancellor)
Ms J Saunders
Dr C Wiffen

In attendance:

Mr D Newman (Secretary)
Dr D Curnow (Deputy Secretary)
Mr N Latham (Chief Operating Officer)
Prof N Sammells (Deputy Vice-Chancellor)

Prof A Taylor (item 17/76)
Dr R Schaaf (item 17/77)
Ms A Stone (items 17/79-81)

Apologies:

Ms N Campbell
Ms T Fisk

Ms K Kennard
Mr D Pester (Deputy Chair)

17/68 APOLOGIES

The Chair welcomed all present to the meeting and noted apologies from Nina Campbell, Teresa Fisk, Kat Kennard and David Pester. In addition, Martin Francis had sent apologies for late arrival.

17/69 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 27TH JUNE 2018

In the list of attendees for the meeting, "Dr S Williams" was corrected to "Dr S McMillan", with which amendment the draft minutes were agreed as a true record.

17/70 MATTERS ARISING

The Chair drew the Board's attention to the schedule of actions arising from the previous meeting appended to the Board papers. There were no other matters arising.

17/71 CHAIR'S BUSINESS

The Chair welcomed new Independent Members Iain Mansfield, Vinita Nawathe and Joy Saunders to the Board. He was also pleased to welcome David Newman, University Secretary, who had recently joined Bath Spa University from King's College London. The Board confirmed

the appointment of David Newman to the office of Clerk to the Board of Governors, noting that this role would be referred to as Secretary to the Board of Governors going forward.

This meeting was to have been the final meeting for Kat Kennard, one of the two student members of the Board and who was unable to attend this meeting. A formal note of thanks from the Board for her contribution during her year of appointment would be sent.

[ACTION: SECRETARY]

The Chair outlined some changes that would be formally proposed when a number of Independent Governors stood down in November. These included Jonathan Glasspool becoming Deputy Chair of the Board of Governors and, with that, chairing the Remuneration Committee; and Joy Saunders taking over as Chair of the Audit Committee, enabling Teresa Fisk to move to Chairing the Finance and Infrastructure Committee. Members were asked to provide any comments to the Chair outside of the meeting. Expressions of interest for joining committees of the Board were also invited.

17/72 ROLE OF UNIVERSITY SECRETARY

Mr Newman outlined the three main aspects to his role, which was new to the University. These were:

- i. to serve the Board of Governors and its committees;
- ii. to act as in-house solicitor for the University and oversee the provision of legal services provided from external lawyers; and
- iii. to lead the Compliance Department.

[Mr Blake joined the meeting]

17/73 REVIEW OF CONSTITUTION (Paper G1008)

The Secretary reported on the review of the Constitution, which had been in progress prior to him taking up post. He noted that changes were largely presentational and were intended to provide a clearer document that met the University's needs by providing an unambiguous top-level constitution that would be underpinned by more detailed procedural documents.

The process of review had included a meeting with trade union representatives, which had made the following requests:

- i. that one place on the Board should be reserved for a trade union representative;
- ii. that the two staff positions should be elected rather than appointed; and
- iii. that care was needed in the exercise of conferring any benefits on governors, in particular in respect of how this might impact on the reputation of the University.

There was some discussion around these points and it was agreed that the request to reserve a seat on the Board for a trade union representative should be rejected. Regarding the second point, the word "nominated" was suggested as an alternative to "appointed" as this enabled freedom for the University in how it determined who should be put forwards whilst still preserving the necessary right of the Board of Governors to reject a candidate. The third point from the unions was acknowledged and supported.

In response to a query relating to the wording of Academic Freedom, it was confirmed that the proposed wording corresponded with the current expression and was aligned with the text published by the Office for Students. Members agreed this approach was appropriate. Discussion also confirmed broader support for the revised constitution, in particular the clarity with which it was now couched. The Chair noted there were some further minor points the he would discuss with the University Secretary outside of the meeting.

[ACTION: CHAIR/SECRETARY]

The Board approved the proposal that, subject to amendments arising from this discussion, informal consent for the draft constitution should be sought from the Privy Council in advance of formal approval by the Board of Governors in November and seeking of formal consent from the Privy Council thereafter.

17/74 VICE-CHANCELLOR'S REPORT (Paper G1009)

With reference to correspondence about the anticipated number of students for the coming academic year with members of the Board of Governors that had taken place the day before the meeting, the Vice-Chancellor noted that she would focus on aspects other than student numbers, which would be addressed under the next item.

In adding to her written report, the Vice-Chancellor discussed further the following:

External environment

At the recent annual Universities UK (UUK) Vice-Chancellors' Conference, there was an encouraging message from government that British higher education was valued, although this was in the context of development over the next thirty years. The greatest challenges in the short-term were likely to be related to the review of post-18 funding, currently due to report in the late autumn, in which there was a risk that very small changes might be proposed which would not advantage students but could seriously damage university finances. The University Executive had considered some of the possible outcomes of this and would value the opportunity to explore this more fully with the Board. The Board agreed this would be helpful and Mr Mansfield offered to spend some time with staff to inform modelling.

[ACTION: MR MANSFIELD/VICE-CHANCELLOR]

In addition to ongoing action in the sector over the USS pension scheme, Unions were balloting members over this year's pay increase which was likely to cause unrest until at least the spring.

Reference was made to the short term focus of the Office for Students. The University was working with its mission groups on many of these matters, particularly Million Plus. Further, although UCAS opened for 2019 applicants on the 5 September, the University – like the majority of higher education providers in the sector – was still awaiting the outcome of registration with the Office for Students, a condition of being within the UCAS system.

Recruitment

Recruitment was one of the greatest challenges to the University at present and too few applicants were being attracted to study at the University. This was being addressed through a raft of initiatives, including: new programme development for 2019 entry; a novel process of recruitment that provided the opportunity for contextualised offers through the identification of potential, complemented by a scholarship scheme that incentivised and rewarded high achievement at A-level; and expanded marketing activities. The entry opportunities were distinctive in the sector and would be promoted on the University's website but broader marketing would need to be carefully managed owing to the risk of confusion with some other institutions' practices around unconditional offers and the possibility of misrepresentation in the media.

To address the impact on the University's finances, non-pay costs had been reduced for 2018/19 and there was an intention to reduce staff costs for 2019/20. These would need to be evidence-based, but as they typically took a long time to come through, needed to be tackled expeditiously. Opportunities to scale back activity would be explored during the autumn and confirmed by December so that cuts could commence in the spring to enable benefits from August 2019. At the

same time, the University also needs to address its student:staff ratio which is currently 19:1 against a sector norm of 15:1.

The Board noted its support for this proactive approach. It was posited that, with a reduction of staff and students and in the context of new programme development, some programmes would be unsustainable and there would, therefore, be a need to discontinue some current provision. The University Executive concurred, noting that opportunities to deliver more efficiently by removing very low recruiting subject combinations had already been identified and that the modular system operated on the University's undergraduate programmes enabled the translation of declining programmes to new ones whilst limiting damage to morale and reputation.

Semesterisation

From this academic year, levels 4 and 5 (the first two years of full-time undergraduate study) would be delivered through a semesterised pattern. The task of re-approving provision to this pattern of delivery, in conjunction with a curriculum review, had been a significant exercise for the University and there would be an inevitable settling period in which adjustments would need to be made as theory was translated into practice.

National Student Survey

The National Student Survey (NSS) 2018 would be explored more fully in a separate item on the agenda but, whilst the University had gone up slightly on overall satisfaction (aided by numerical rounding rules), all underlying categories had decreased in satisfaction. Meetings were currently taking place between all subject leaders and the Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-Provost for Student Experience. These meetings were exploring instances of good practice and indicating where particular difficulties lay. Other work to address NSS outcomes included: significant development to the student representation system during the course of 2017/18 for implementation a re-launch of the system in 2018/19; a review of the first and second year student survey to better inform NSS outcomes; and investment in the Student Union Management System which would be implemented from the second semester and had been successful in other institutions.

Estates

Work was continuing to enable much greater use of the Main House at Newton Park for staff and students, extending use of the rooms into evenings. This included re-decorating to make the rooms more flexible and more inviting, as well as the creation of a café in the room leading off the main entrance hall. Nina Campbell was thanked for her work in supporting this.

The development of the Locksbrook Campus was slightly behind schedule but conversations with the contractor had been reassuring regarding how this would be addressed. Opportunities for using the Locksbrook Campus development immediately to encourage applications were discussed. It was further noted that the contractors were keen to use the development for their own promotion and this would be beneficial to the University as well. Members enquired about the opportunity to view the development and the Vice-Chancellor agreed that this could be arranged.

[ACTION: VICE-CHANCELLOR/SECRETARY]

Future Education World, Ras Al Khaimah

The Board confirmed its intent for the registration with the Ras Al Khaimah authorities of the University's collaborative academic development with Future Education World, Ras Al Khaimah, and the continued authorisation of the Vice-Chancellor to act on behalf of the Board of Governors in this matter.

Strategy 2030

The development of the University's Strategy to 2030 was now underway. There was an ambition for at least 40% of staff to contribute and meetings were being complemented by postcards that members of the University could complete and submit to inform thinking. Work was also taking place with the Students' Union on student participation which would be structured to support student understanding and engagement in the process.

Other matters

A re-structure of the committees under the Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Group (VCAG) would now enable the full range of appropriate advice to be provided to the Executive, particularly from Professional Services.

The Board was saddened to learn of the recent death of one of the University's undergraduate students. The Vice-Chancellor reported that the University was providing support to the student cohort in response to this sad news.

Paper G1009 was noted. Owing to the necessarily wide-ranging nature of the Vice-Chancellor's report and the importance of its content, this standing item would be given more time on the agenda in future.

[ACTION: SECRETARY]

[Mr Francis joined the meeting]

17/75 STUDENT RECRUITMENT AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS: EARLY INDICATIONS (Paper G1010 and tabled amendment)

The Vice-Chancellor provided an update on anticipated student numbers for the coming academic year. A drop in student numbers for both undergraduate programmes and initial teacher training had been anticipated in the assumptions that informed budget planning for 2018/19. Undergraduate numbers looked likely to be just over 2,000, around 50-75 below the previous assumptions, and initial teacher training – whilst down on the previous year – appeared to have recovered approximately 30 against planning assumptions.

Discussion of the Board focused on the postgraduate taught numbers, for which a serious error had come to light earlier in the week. A correction to the part of the paper dealing with these numbers was tabled. The Vice-Chancellor explained that accurate prediction of student numbers was key to budget planning and, at the point of planning for 2018/19, there had been a high level of confidence in the accuracy of those numbers. In fact, cross-checks had just revealed that, whilst the algorithm for predicting student numbers was secure, there was an error for postgraduate taught programmes in how the raw data translated to that algorithm. As a consequence, instead of approximately 430 students, a maximum of 270 students were now anticipated. This compared poorly to 2017 and meant a reduction in income of approximately £1 million - £1.5 million against budget planning.

The Vice-Chancellor reassured the Board that further checks were taking place to ensure that this error was not replicated elsewhere. There were also investigations as to how the discrepancy had not been identified previously, which would include a re-consideration of where and how numbers should be challenged for accuracy and effectiveness. In terms of the deficit in the budget, the Vice-Chancellor confirmed that the Executive was in agreement that this would not affect the agreed surplus but, rather, would be dealt with through in-year cuts and internal austerity that would result in some projects being put on hold and a longer timescale for delivery of others.

Whilst acknowledging the seriousness of the situation, the Board thanked the Vice-Chancellor for the openness and honesty with which this had been brought to their attention and for the way in which it was being handled. It was agreed that the Executive needed a reasonable opportunity to identify more specifically where the deficit could be mitigated and that this should be communicated to the Board by an email from the Vice-Chancellor in due course.

[ACTION: VICE-CHANCELLOR]

Members of the Board asked about implications for future budgets from this situation, acknowledging that the postgraduate students were generally on one-year programmes which limited the impact beyond 2018/19. The Vice-Chancellor confirmed that point, and that postgraduate taught students paid lower fees than undergraduate students, but noted that an urgent review of the postgraduate taught portfolio would be necessary and would now be a much higher priority because this situation had revealed that the portfolio was not attracting students, contrary to what had been thought.

There was discussion as to the role of the Audit Committee and whether an audit or risk assessment would help to prevent such a situation arising again. Whilst the Audit Committee had looked at this in the past, no issue had been found but that was possibly because the questions had tested other aspects. The current situation, whilst regrettable, would enable the correct questions to be asked and this would be a conversation for the Audit Committee.

[ACTION: MS FISK/MS SAUNDERS]

The Vice-Chancellor added that, more generally, the larger programmes that were not as expensive to deliver were failing to recruit whilst those that were resource-heavy were recruiting reasonably well. Significant effort and funds had been put towards conversion activity and the Clearing exercise but the University had still under-recruited against target and below the previous year. In response to this, an external audit of marketing and recruitment activity by a peer in the sector had been instigated.

Paper G1010, the tabled amendment to it and the actions of the University Executive were noted.

[Mr Osborne left the meeting]

[Professor Taylor joined the meeting]

17/76 INTERNATIONAL ASPIRATIONS 2020-2030 (Paper G1011)

The Vice-Chancellor outlined the process for the development of the University's Strategy 2030. Over the autumn, there would be the opportunity for discussions and submission of comments on postcards, then the narrative would be pulled together in December for the development of the various strands. Students would also have the opportunity to contribute in a variety of ways which would recognise differing levels of experience and support them in making a contribution. Part of the information-gathering exercise would involve deep open-ended thought pieces for the Board as part of the process, and this provocation paper on internationalisation was the first of these as it was, arguably, the most challenging. The Executive Dean of Bath School of Art and Design would take the lead on this section.

Discussion opened around the GALA network and the relative value of this to the University. Currently, this cost the University approximately £100,000 a year, but all members understood that Bath Spa University would stop funding it in two years' time and, if the network was to continue beyond that point, it would need to operate on a membership subscription scheme. Members of the Board recognised the value of GALA, which had a number of prestigious members and had fostered strong, mutually-beneficial relationships.

It was posited that internationalisation of experience was critical for students who would need to succeed in a global environment, but Members of the Board were cognisant that that was not something necessarily offered through Transnational Education (TNE) and there was little appetite for the risk that went with such partnerships. Rather, energies would be better focused on enhancing the University's core offer through internationalising the student experience and finding ways to overcome some of the practical challenges that discouraged students from taking up these opportunities.

Broadly, the Board suggested that internationalisation activities should be sustainable, ethically sound and based on partnerships with clear mutual benefit. This meant that there were some countries with which it would not be appropriate to work and, similarly, ways in which it would not be appropriate to work. With the University's current financial position, it could not afford to enter into any activities that lost money.

Professor Taylor thanked Governors for their reflections and offered the opportunity for any of them to speak or correspond with her if there were further thoughts on this that they would like to contribute. The Vice-Chancellor noted that there was a number of themes proposed for the Strategy 2030. She offered to share the list with Governors and invited expressions of interest for reflections and contributions to other sections.

[ACTION: SECRETARY]

Paper G1011 was noted.

[Professor Taylor left the meeting]

[Dr Schaaf joined the meeting]

17/77 NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY 2018: RESULTS AND ACTIONS (Paper G1012)

The Chair welcomed Dr Schaaf to the meeting and congratulated her on her promotion to the post of Vice-Provost for Student Experience.

Dr Schaaf noted that efforts to encourage students to respond to the National Student Survey (NSS) in 2018 had been successful and there had been an 86% response rate, meaning that the outcomes were a true representation of the views of the graduating cohort. The two critical areas that needed to be addressed in the year ahead were Organisation and Management (which was also recognised as being instrumental for overall student satisfaction) and the Student Voice. In addition to long-term proposals that would form part of the Strategy 2030, efforts were being made to enhance responses at programme-level by encouraging programme leaders to consider the holistic student experience and through the institutional-level Student Experience Priorities (SEPs) which were underway to address seven areas of work that would impact on the student experience.

At the invitation of the Board, Dr Schaaf provided further information on the "SPA weeks" (special projects and activities) initiative: one week in each semester when the normal timetable would be suspended to enable students and staff to engage in enrichment activities. This would include a focus on retention with all level 4 (first-year undergraduate) students receiving information about SPA weeks during Welcome Week and tutorials for those students taking place in SPA weeks to provide additional support.

With respect to the NSS 2018 outcomes, the Students' Union President observed that the results did not truly reflect the student experience and that there was a tendency amongst the student population to use the NSS to complain about some relatively minor or peripheral issues at the expense of core matters where there was not an issue. He outlined work that would be taking place over the coming year by the Students' Union to support students in engaging in the NSS in an informed way so that the outcomes were a more accurate reflection of the student experience.

Members of the Board affirmed the initiatives and action being taken but, with reference to some of the free text comments in the NSS 2018, inquired as to whether the University's proposed actions would address the fundamental problems that were identified, particularly in relation to organisation and management. The University Executive acknowledged that, in some areas of the University, there was a need for significant improvement in local-level leadership. The Vice-Chancellor and Deputy Vice-Chancellor both also identified a need to resolve challenges at institutional-level with the timetable. These related in part to the complexity created by a very open offer around module and subject choice, which raised student expectations that could not be met, and the need to move to a fixed timetable to enable students to manage their commitments.

With regard to the student voice, Dr Wiffen advised the Board that, from a staff member perspective, he was aware that the students' perception was that they were encouraged to offer suggestions and comments but did not always get a clear response back so became frustrated, and there was a need to address the "feedback loop".

The Vice-Chancellor added that, whilst issues would be addressed and the drop in the NSS could be recovered, it was likely to take some time to achieve everything that the University wanted and the journey to that point might not be linear.

In addition to the sector studies that had informed the University's considerations, Mr Mansfield noted a recent Department for Education publication on drivers of student satisfaction which he would arrange to share with the Vice-Provost for Student Experience.

[ACTION: MR MANSFIELD]

Paper G1012 was noted.

[Dr Schaaf left the meeting]

17/78 LEAGUE TABLES OVERVIEW (Paper G1013)

The Chief Operating Officer advised the Board that the impact of league tables on recruitment has relevance for the University. Further, that to improve in the league tables, improvement in performance was not sufficient in itself but, rather, had to be improvement relative to other higher education providers. To complement paper G1013, he gave a presentation that illustrated which of the University's subjects were improving and which were declining against the sector.

The four areas on which the University needed to focus were identified as student:staff ratios, the National Student Survey outcomes, employability outcomes of graduates, and entry requirements/standards. This fourth aspect presented some tension with the need to increase recruitment.

In terms of the proposal to introduce contextualised offers to applicants and the impact this might have on entry tariffs, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor suggested to the Board that the University did not currently have the luxury of worrying about the effect that lower entry qualifications might have on league tables. In response to a question from the Board, he confirmed that lower entry qualifications could, however, be expected to provide some benefits in the "value added" measurement, and Bath Spa University did have a track record of supporting students to achieve their potential.

Paper G1013 was noted.

[Ms Stone joined the meeting]

17/79 STAFF SURVEY (Paper G1014)

Whilst there was a number of positive outcomes identified in the staff survey of June 2018, including a high response rate and an increased percentage of staff indicating they would recommend the institution as a place to work, the responses relating to bullying and harassment indicated a significant rise from twelve months' previously. The Director of Human Resources advised the Board that, on interrogation, this was related primarily to staff struggling with their workloads rather than bullying or harassment in the formal sense, and the highest proportion was also associated with the College of Liberal Arts where re-structuring was ongoing. That the underlying issue was a grievance with the workplace rather than bullying and harassment had also emerged in the workshops and discussion groups that had taken place across the institution over the last twelve months. The Director of Human Resources confirmed that the University would continue to promote the Harassment Advisors Network and other initiatives to support staff, irrespective of whether or not the reporting of bullying and harassment was erroneous.

Members recognised the correlation between morale in the staff survey and the student survey outcomes. There was some discussion regarding the next point at which there would be validity in seeking to measure perceptions of bullying and harassment through the staff survey again; on reflection, the proposal to include this next in the summer of 2019 was considered most appropriate.

Paper G1014 was noted.

17/80 EQUALITY REVIEW (Paper G1015)

Members reflected on the current position of the University, as set out in paper G1015. The Director of Human Resources indicated some of the continuing work in this area, including an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion week in the week commencing 16 October, to which all members of the Board were invited.

With reference to Objective 3 relating to the recruitment of BAME staff, the Board advised that this might be amended to a measurement of the conversion of applicants to appointments, within a set tolerance, rather than the target proposed which may be overly ambitious in the context of the region. It was also suggested that, in considering the diversity of senior staff, this should be extended beyond gender to the full range of equality and diversity measures (Objective 2).

The Chair extended thanks to Ms Heald for her work on this review and also to Professor Reynolds for her genuine challenge to the group in their work.

Paper G1015 was noted. The Board agreed that activities should now be mainstreamed and, with amendments as discussed, the objectives set out in paragraph 5.5 were approved.

17/81 STAFF DIVERSITY REPORT (Paper G1016)

The Director of Human Resources reported on staff diversity, noting that the University performed strongly against the sector on female professors (as headcount rather than full-time equivalent because a number were part-time) and also for Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) senior staff. The focus would now continue to be on encouraging the appointment of more females to senior staff positions and BAME appointments more generally.

There was some discussion regarding the sensitivity of aspects of this reporting, which might dissuade some respondents from committing to answers.

It was agreed that sample sizes would also be included in future reports to mitigate concerns about small samples being disproportionately skewed by one or two people.

Paper G1016 was noted.

The Chair encouraged all members of the Board to complete the 2018 Equality Monitoring Form, which would be emailed to those who were not present.

[ACTION: ALL/SECRETARY]
[Ms Stone left the meeting]

17/82 ITEMS FOR RECEIPT

The following minutes were received:

- Academic Board 15th May 2018

17/83 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There were two other items of business raised by the Secretary.

- Members of the Board of Governors were reminded that they could submit nominations for Honorary Awards of the University. The University's Honorary Awards and Titles Committee would be meeting shortly and Ms Heald represented the Board of Governors on that Committee.
- Members were thanked for responses on availability for a dinner in November. They were asked to continue to hold the date and details would be circulated shortly by the Secretary's office.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 3:40pm.

David Newman
Secretary to the Board of Governors
September 2018

Signed as a record of confirmed minutes by:

Mr Terence Jagger
Chair

Date
21st November 2018