

UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON HIGHER EDUCATION CORPORATION

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Minutes of the Board of Governors held on 27 March 2024

Present: John Garwood (Chair), Amanda Broderick (Vice-Chancellor & President), Aswin Mathew, Ben Buckton, Bibin Bobacham, Doris Olulode, Fiona Bolton, Gavin Poole, Jackie Craissati, Jazz Bhogal, Matthew Almond, Regina Everitt, Sarah Fahy, Sir Les Ebdon, Sophia Bokhari, Tommy MacDonnell and Trevor Critchlow.

In attendance: Bugewa Apampa (PVC Education & Experience), Dean Curtis (Deputy Vice-Chancellor), Hassan Abdalla (Provost), Jim Benson (University Secretary), Joseph Cooper (Director of People and Culture), Matt Bellgard (PVC, Impact and Innovation), Paul Marshall (PVC, Careers & Enterprise), Vanessa Varvas (Chief Marketing Officer)

Officer: Ceren Alver (Compliance Officer)

Apologies: Amanjit Jhund, Bindi Karia, Steven Armstrong

23/70 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

70/01 NOTED: that there were no declarations of interest.

23/71 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 20 FEBRUARY 2024

71/01 NOTED: the minutes of the meeting held on 20 February 2024 would be circulated after the meeting for the approval of the Board of Governors, as they were not ready for distribution at this time.

23/72 MATTERS ARISING

72/01 RECEIVED: a report from the Compliance Officer on matters arising from previous meetings.

72/02 NOTED that:

- a) the planning permission for the Stratford New Building had been secured. The Board of Governors extended their congratulations to the team for successfully achieving this.

- b) the Board were reminded of the dates of Academic Board meetings 24 April 2024 and 19 June 2024 which had been circulated earlier and it was agreed to advise of the meeting dates in 2025/25 when these were confirmed. Governors were again urged to attend these meetings on a rotating basis to enhance oversight and understanding of Academic Board matters.

23/73 REPORT OF BUSINESS DISCUSSED AT STANDING COMMITTEES

73/01 RECEIVED: a report from the University Secretary on business discussed at standing committees.

73/02 NOTED that:

- a) the Deputy Chair of the Board would be stepping down at the end of this academic year and the role had been exclusively offered to independent members. It was proposed by the Governance and Search Committee to initiate the search for the role immediately after the Board of Governors meeting, with a deadline for receiving applications of 24 April 2024. Interviews with candidates would then be scheduled for 7 May 2024 and would be undertaken by the Governance and Search Committee. The recommendation of the Governance and Search Committee would then be presented to the Board of Governors meeting due to be held on 21 May 2024.
- b) three members of the Board of Governors would be retiring from the Board on 31 July 2024, and Trevor Critchlow's first term of office was due to end on 31 July 2024. The Governance and Search Committee recommended to the Board of Governors that Trevor Critchlow be appointed as an independent board member for a second term of three years.

73/02 AGREED:

- a) to approve the proposed process and timetable for appointing the next Deputy Chair.
- b) that Trevor Critchlow be appointed as an independent board member for a second term of three years.

23/74 RISK SUMMARY & RISK MANAGEMENT

74/01 RECEIVED: a report summarising UEL's strategic risks and two deep dives from the Interim Head of Risk Management.

74/02 NOTED that:

- a) The changes in risk areas were identified in Annex A. The Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee emphasised the importance of receiving updates from the chairs of other committees of any emerging risk areas which had been identified within their respective areas of responsibility. While the University Executive Board was tasked with managing the Risk Register,

emphasis was given to the importance of the Board of Governors engaging actively by challenging or recommending changes as they deemed necessary.

- b) the format of the Risk Report would be changed by the Interim Head of Risk. Furthermore, quarterly updates on the risk management summary and risk exercises would be conducted to assess and mitigate potential risks effectively.

23/75 PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT: 12-MONTH PROGRESS & PERFORMANCE UPDATE

75/01 RECEIVED: a presentation from the Pro Vice-Chancellor Impact & Innovation providing an update on the public engagement.

75/02 NOTED that:

- a) In March 2023 the University initiated a Public and Community Engagement Framework (PC&E Framework) aimed at connecting the University with society and facilitating a visionary, aspirational and engaging journey with staff, students, alumni and external stakeholders. The PC&E Framework included the following:
 - i) Recognition (needs)-working in concert with stakeholders on issues of significance in society through horizon scanning, identifying key challenges, opportunities, successes to date and harnessing community resources;
 - ii) Revitalisation (needs assessment and alignment)-in partnerships with communities, proactively defining strategic initiatives and leveraging UEL/Community expertise and know how to strive to be conceptual, co-creative and clever;
 - iii) Realisation (delivery)-co-funding, co-designing and implementing innovative solutions and services locally, nationally and internationally. It was noted that the Impact of the PC&E Framework had been captured within UEL's 2023 Impact report.
- b) The University would be adopting the Civic Impact Framework developed by the Civic University Network in partnership with Sheffield Hallam University going forward.
- c) The Board of Governors received assurance that civic engagement was robust, as the University actively pursued impact across various dimensions, such as sustainability with smart cities, health and well-being, and the data economy. These efforts were aligned with the impact and innovation strategy and mapped to the Sustainable Development Goals. Consideration was given to the challenge of involving diverse groups and stakeholders, including third

sector organisations and volunteer groups. It was noted that opportunities for engagement with the third sector should be explored.

- d) The Board of Governors was briefed about various community projects including initiatives to engage youth in art and culture activities with support from local organisations such as the Newham Art Foundation to address crime reduction. Free services provided to the small and medium-sized local businesses by the Tax and Accountancy Clinic and the Sustainability Research Institute were highlighted as good examples of community engagement. Additionally, the Psychology School's clinic was highlighted for its contribution to community support in addressing post-COVID trauma.

23/76 THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE AND THE STUDENTS' UNION

76/01 RECEIVED: a report from the Chief Student Officer and University Secretary providing an update on student experience and Students' Union (SU).

76/02 NOTED that:

- a) Consideration was given to how the Governors could be supported in gaining a better understanding of the work of the Students' Union. It was noted that the meeting with the Students' Union and the report presented by the Chief Student Officer were both very helpful in this regard.
- b) Acknowledging the necessity of promoting inclusivity and diversity within the university community, consideration was given to the importance of equal opportunity in representation and engagement activities. Key factors contributing to low engagement were pinpointed, notably the challenges posed by the cost of living and mental health issues. In response to specific feedback from UEL students, adjustments had been made to the events programme by the SU. This included focusing on providing smaller, focused events aimed at facilitating connections among students based on common interests. Consideration was given to the risks associated with focusing on hosting smaller events, as there was a concern that this approach might lead to the creation of small niche interest groups instead of nurturing UEL identity and belonging.
- c) Compared to previous years, higher engagement levels had been achieved in the events organised by the student societies. Efforts were directed towards supporting the societies through training, planning and funding, with a focus on encouraging students to establish and manage their own societies facilitating the development of leadership and organisational skills among students leading these events.
- d) The Board recognised the progress which had been made in student engagement and congratulated SU members for their achievement.

23/77 CONNECTED CAMPUS PROGRESS & PERFORMANCE

77/01 RECEIVED: a presentation from the Deputy Vice Chancellor & Chief Finance Officer providing an update on the current 2023/24 plan of work delivering the Connected Campus transformation programme, as a part of Vision 2028.

77/02 NOTED that:

- a) The first five years of the Connected Campus transformation programme focused on enhancing the facilities which had significant impact on the vibrancy and first impressions created by improved spaces across all campuses. The key projects which had been delivered in 2023/24 included achieving planning permission for the redevelopment of the Stratford site, the opening of the Royal Docks Centre for Sustainability, USS refurbishment, and improvements to the ground floor of the Arthur Edwards building.
- b) The next phase of the programme would focus on achieving Net Zero Carbon and renovating teaching spaces. The themes which were developed to span the next five years of Vision 2028 included: (i) Stratford redevelopment, (ii) Hospital and Primary Care Training Hub, (iii) Theatre Square Development, with further planning of the remaining spaces of the USS and The Arts Venue - Stratford Youth Zone Cultural Operator (Stratford Circus), (iv) Land to the West, and (v) Net Zero Carbon.
- c) The Deputy Vice Chancellor & Chief Finance Officer provided an update on the next steps of Stratford redevelopment which would involve negotiating the planning conditions and working on the preparations for the detailed design and enabling works package, targeted to be implemented this summer, with the main works commencing shortly after.
- d) The Hospital and Primary Care Training Hub project, which involved the repurposing of the west wing of the CE Building at Stratford into the full Hospital and Primary Care Training Hub (H&PCTH), enabling spaces for new advanced IT technology and equipment for digitalised learning, teaching, and assessment, was set to commence in July 2024, with completion scheduled for the 2025/26 academic year.
- e) For the Net Zero carbon, a contract had been signed by UEL for the delivery of the next phase (Produce) to install solar panels and electric charging points across Docklands Campus.
- f) As of 31 January 2024, delivery of planned works was at 51%, with actual spend at £18,647k and committed planned works at £13,018k (35%), totalling £31,665k against an approved budget of £36,728k for 2023/24. 14% of the budget was yet to be committed and delivered but had been allocated for the delivery of pipeline projects. Consideration was given as

to how the investments could be sustained over multiple years, with the intention for them to be continued and the ambitious goals to be upheld.

- g) Consideration was given to the future of the campuses, whether they would be fragmented entirely or built flexibly. It was recognised that the utilisation of space would vary depending on the discipline, however there had been a trend towards the dissolution of boundaries between academia and workspace. It was increasingly observed that spaces were no longer designated for single purpose. Within the sector, criticism had been voiced regarding the construction of physical buildings without adequate reflection in the digital space.

23/78 ANNUAL REPORT ON STUDENT COMPLAINTS

78/01 RECEIVED: a Complaints Annual Report 2022/23 from the University Secretary.

78/02 NOTED that:

- a) Overall student complaints were slightly up compared to last year, with a total of 239 complaints being received. The two categories which attracted the highest number of complaints were handling of procedures and course issues. 165 complaints were either resolved through conciliation, withdrawn by students, not progressed or rejected due to not demonstrating valid grounds as specified in the complaint's procedure. In the academic year 2022/23, a total of 62 formal complaints were made. The noted increase in the number of complaints reflected a larger trend observed across the sector, indicating common challenges or issues affecting institutions on a broader scale.
- b) In response to a question about the reasons behind the withdrawal of complaints, it was noted that this was largely due to students not following up with further information when requested. Consideration was given to the low number of complaints compared to other sectors, prompting the question of whether students were actively speaking up. Complaint response times were discussed, with a focus on evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of the current procedures. The Academic Registry received the highest number of complaints among all departments, accounting for 34% of the total. It was noted that the significant portion of these complaints stemmed from a specific issue regarding the issuing of award certificates.
- c) Both the Complaints and Appeals Annual Reports would be reviewed and commented on by the Education and Experience Committee and Academic Board as part of the consultation process. An EDI review on both reports would also be produced.

23/79 REPORT OF BUSINESS DISCUSSED AT ACADEMIC BOARD ON 29 FEBRUARY 2024

79/01 RECEIVED: a report from the Academic Board providing information on business discussed at the Academic Board meeting held on 29 February 2024.

79/02 NOTED that:

- a) Academic Board had requested regular updates on compliance with business-as-usual quality processes. The aim was to review compliance in four key areas in order to make sure students' learning experience and outcomes were as good as possible.
- b) The overall number of external examiners had increased from 251 in 2019/20 to 322 in 2022/23, representing a 40% increase attributed to the substantial growth in our academic portfolio. It was noted that the main topic of discussion at the Academic Board centred on the importance of ensuring that all external examiners were appointed in a timely manner ahead of the new academic year, as well as the challenges surrounding the recruitment of external examiners for academic partners.
- c) University had partnered with a number of prestigious, world-renowned institutions. Currently, UEL had been seeking to cultivate a culture shift, aiming to encourage collaborative relationships characterised by flexibility, equality, and mutual learning opportunities among all parties involved.
- d) Academic Board agreed to adopt a consistent approach to both paid and unpaid placement programmes. Consideration was given to the ethical implications of unpaid placement programmes, particularly in terms of social justice. The distinction between academic placements and professional placements/internships was clarified, highlighting that academic placements typically had involved fulfilling project requirements within the degree program. Academic placements, distinguished by being credit-bearing, had been integral to the curriculum and structured to meet specific academic objectives of the programme.
- e) A motion from the University and College Union (UCU) calling for the University to withdraw its support of the IHRA definition of antisemitism was received by the Academic Board. The input from staff and UCU on this matter was welcomed and extensively discussed. It was agreed to conduct a comprehensive review of all institutional definitions, policy statements, and pledges through the University's governance structures by Academic Board. This review was scheduled to commence on 1 June 2024, and its findings would be presented to the first Academic Board of the 2024/25 academic year.

23/80 UPDATE ON FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM

80/01 RECEIVED: a paper providing an update on Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom and Action Plan from the University Secretary.

80/02 NOTED that: The University participated in two OfS consultations concerning Freedom of Speech, one addressing the complaints process and the other focusing on regulating student unions. A third consultation was recently launched by the OfS on the proposed regulatory advice and other matters relating to freedom of speech which provided scenarios on freedom of speech and academic freedom issues. It was noted that the Ethics Advisory Committee considered the two recent employment tribunal cases which had implications for the way staff were supported when challenged on issues relating to academic freedom, noting that decisions from employment tribunals were only persuasive in establishing case law. It was noted that a workshop to train staff on freedom of speech would be conducted in June 2024, with contributions from both external and internal legal sources. Governors were encouraged to attend this workshop if diaries permitted. It was accepted that the University had a duty to uphold free speech within the law, although it was noted that determining what fell outside this might be challenging as it would potentially cover racially or religiously aggravated offences, fear or provocation of violence, acts intended or likely to stir up hatred on the grounds of race, religion or sexual orientation, incitement to terrorism, and dissemination of terrorist publications.

80/03 AGREED to: endorse the Action Plan developed by the Freedom of Speech Advisory Group.

23/81 HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICY

81/01 RECEIVED: a paper on Health and Safety Policy from the Director of People and Culture.

81/02 NOTED that:

- a) Reviewing and reforming the University's approach to Health and Safety management had been a key priority over the past 12 months and the revised policy represented a key milestone on this journey. Last year the board agreed to defer the approval of the Health and Safety Policy awaiting a more substantial review of governance and assurance arrangements which were reflected in the draft policy. It was noted that the policy aligned with HSE requirements and sector best practice and specifically aligned with the Universities Safety and Health Association Health and Safety Management Profile.
- b) The changes made in the policy outlined as follows:
 - Created the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Board with renewed membership and Terms of Reference;
 - Clarified Executive responsibility for Health and Safety and Wellbeing;
 - Affirmed local responsibility for Health and Safety at school and service level;
 - Established the Wellbeing Sub-committee which provided a home for all wellbeing activity and provided a framework for the development and delivery of a whole University wellbeing strategy;

- Established School and Services Committee to provide a framework for security and assurance for health and safety compliance, and more importantly culture on the ground across the University;
 - Created a specific subcommittee for consultation with staff and unions which in turn creates time and space for strategic focus at the Health Safety and Wellbeing Board.
- c) Creation of KPIs for Health, Safety, and Wellbeing by the Health Safety and Wellbeing Board would form the next steps, which would be a component of regular reporting to UEB and annual reporting to the Board. It was noted that a consolidated wellbeing strategy—in alignment with the discussions at the recent Strategy away day, would be developed by the Wellbeing Committee.

81/03 AGREED: that the University Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policy Statement of Intent be signed by the VC & President and Chair of Board of Governors.

23/82 CHAIR'S BUSINESS

82/01 NOTED that: Universities were required to have an access and participation plan if they wanted to charge above the basic tuition fee cap. The current access and participation plan, which would expire at the end of the next academic year, and the risk register would be revisited by the Board for approval. A briefing session was to be planned for the Board in May 2024 on this issue.

23/83 UPDATE ON THE APPOINTMENT OF THE CHAIR OF THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS, 2024/2025

83/01 RECEIVED: a paper regarding appointment of the Chair of Board of Governors from the University Secretary.

83/02 NOTED that:

- a) The Board had agreed to advertise for the position of Chair at its meeting in November 2023. The advert was published in January 2024 which received a reasonable response. Nine candidates were formally considered by the Governance and Search Committee, with three selected for interview, but one of these candidates withdrew from the process. Following the interview process Governance and Search Committee unanimously recommended Dr. Steven Armstrong for appointment as the Chair of the Board of Governors.
- b) Consideration was given to appointing the Chair for a four-year term to avoid the situation where both the chair and deputy chair leave their positions simultaneously. This was agreed with the deputy chair to be appointed to serve for three years.

83/03 UPON VOTING, AGREED that: Steven Armstrong be appointed as the Chair of the Board of Governors for a period of 4 years starting from 1 August 2024.

23/84 UPDATE ON THE APPOINTMENT OF THE BOARD MEMBERS

84/01 NOTED: A positive response was received regarding the Perret Laver search for the appointment of Board members. Thirty candidates were initially put forward, with eight of them proceeding to interviews. Following the interview process, four strong candidates emerged and were subsequently put forward to meet with the Vice-Chancellor and President. After these meetings, it was noted that the details of the candidates would be shared with the Board for consideration.

23/85 GOVERNANCE EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW

85/01 RECEIVED: a paper from the University Secretary on governance effectiveness along with the Final Report from the AdvanceHE on the governance effectiveness review. Aaron Porter of AdvanceHE attended for this item.

85/02 NOTED that:

- a) The Governance Effectiveness Review Report issued by the AdvanceHE was presented which indicated that governance at the University was effective, characterised by a high degree of commitment to effective governance among both the Board and the Executive. The report highlighted the positive relationship between the Board and the Executive, as well as a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion.
- b) It was explained that the recommendations and suggestions were aimed at enhancing governance practice, many of which were put forward to the reviewers in the course of carrying out their work. It was noted that the decision on implementing the recommendations and suggestions rested with the Board of Governors.
- c) Consideration was given to each of the 13 recommendations and 8 suggestions across 4 main sections of the report, with each being reviewed and considered, one by one.
- d) The induction process was considered essential for bringing new members up to speed, with an emphasis placed on understanding regulatory and compliance environment, particularly for governors not from the higher education sector. It was suggested to establish a repository accessible for needed information, serving as a self-serve resource.
- e) Consideration was given to holding occasional joint meetings with the Academic Board, but they were regarded as not essential. The proposed joint meetings with the Academic Board was not accepted although Board members would continue to be encouraged to attend meetings of Academic Board. It was suggested that an external review of the Academic Board's effectiveness might have been beneficial to provide assurance to the Board of Governors.

- f) Consideration was given to the suggestion regarding whether the number of members of the Executive Board attending Board of Governors meetings could be reduced. The importance of maintaining the effective culture attained with the UEB's participation in the meetings had been emphasised. There was however a suggestion for governors to have more opportunities to discuss matters without the UEB being present, while still maintaining UEB's participation as the norm.
- g) Progress had been made in reviewing the breadth of engagement between the Students' Union and the executive. The establishment of a joint group had facilitated open dialogue and collaboration, while additional initiatives like informal meet-ups had encouraged meaningful interactions beyond formal channels. It was noted that no further action was required at this time in relation to this recommendation in the Government Effectiveness Report.

85/03 AGEED to:

- a) Accept the recommendations and suggestions outlined in the Government Effectiveness Review Report issued by AdvanceHE, with the exception of Suggestion number 8, which recommended holding joint meetings with the Academic Board, and Recommendation G, which concerned the review of engagement with the Students' Union.
- b) Engage with an external review body to review the effectiveness of the Academic Board to provide assurance to the Board of Governors.

23/87 USE OF THE CORPORATION'S SEAL

87/01 NOTED: that the Corporation's Seal has not been used since the last meeting of the Board.

23/88 TO NOTE THE DATES OF MEETINGS OF THE BOARD FOR 2023/24

88/01 NOTED: that the dates of meetings for 2023/24 were as follows:

21 May 2024

9 July 2024.