

## UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON HIGHER EDUCATION CORPORATION

### BOARD OF GOVERNORS

#### Minutes of the Board of Governors held on 28 November 2023 in The Lounge, Docklands Campus

**Present:** John Garwood (Chair), Matthew Almond, Steven Armstrong (via Teams), Bibin Bobacham, Amanda Broderick (Vice-Chancellor & President), Sophia Bokhari, Fiona Bolton, Ben Buckton (via Teams), Jackie Craissati (via Teams), Trevor Critchlow, Les Ebdon (via Teams), Regina Everitt, Sarah Fahy, Amanjit Jhund (via Teams), Tommy MacDonnell (via Teams), Aswin Mathew and Doris Olulode

**In attendance:** Hassan Abdalla (Provost), Ceren Alver (Compliance Officer), Bugewa Apampa (PVC, Education and Experience), Matt Bellgard (PVC, Impact and Innovation), Jim Benson (University Secretary), Sophie Bowen (Chief Student Officer), Laura Clayton (Director of Strategy), Joseph Cooper (Director of People and Culture), Dean Curtis (DVC & Chief Finance Officer), Deborah Lewis (Head of Strategic Engagement), Paul Marshall (PVC, Careers and Enterprise), Amy Rogerson (Chief of Staff), Vanessa Varvas (Chief Marketing Officer), and Scott Williams (Deputy Chief Marketing Officer)

**Officer:** Jane Thomas (Governance Manager)

**Apologies:** Jazz Bhogal, Bindi Karia and Gavin Poole

#### 23/24 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

**24/01 NOTED:** that Amanjit Jhund worked for one of the hospitals that was part of the Barts Health NHS Trust.

#### 23/25 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 17 OCTOBER 2023

**25/01 RECEIVED and CONFIRMED:** the minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2023.

#### 23/26 MATTERS ARISING

**26/01 RECEIVED:** a report from the Governance Manager on matters arising from previous meetings.

**26/02 NOTED that:**

- a) an item on medical education had been included on the agenda, as had the appointment of a Chancellor.

- b) in relation to the Stratford new build, it was noted that a request had been made by Newham Council for the University to undertake a further round of public consultation in relation to three areas of impact assessment. Due to the timing of the Planning Committee meetings, it was unlikely that a decision would be reached until February 2024.

## **23/27 REPORT OF BUSINESS DISCUSSED AT STANDING COMMITTEES**

**27/01 RECEIVED:** a report from the Governance Manager on business discussed at standing committees.

**27/02 NOTED that:**

- a) a report in relation to an incident of potential fraud at the University had been discussed at both the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) and the Finance and Resources Committee (FRC). It had been agreed at both ARC and FRC that this was a reportable event and information should be provided to the OfS.
- b) a further issue had been raised as to whether this was an incident that should be reported to the Police, which was the recommendation from FRC. The University Secretary stated that he would need to take further legal advice in order to understand the full implications for the University.

**27/03 AGREED:**

- a) the Board agreed that this incident should be reported to the OfS.
- b) the University Secretary should take legal advice in relation to the implications for the University if the incident were to be reported to the Police. Subject to the Vice Chancellor and President being content about the risk involved, the matter would be reported to the Police.

## **23/28 RISK SUMMARY**

**28/01 RECEIVED:** a risk summary from the University Secretary.

**28/02 NOTED:**

- a) that the information contained within the risk summary was out of date, largely due to a number of issues which had occurred in relation to recruiting to the Risk Manager post whilst the role holder is on maternity leave. It was noted that the role had now been offered to a new individual. It was hoped that they would be able to start in the near future and they would be asked to refresh the risk register for presentation to UEB and the Board. It was recognised that there had been a great deal of good work undertaken in relation to risk management and there was a desire to ensure that this was not lost. It was noted that there were plans to broaden the team in which the Risk Manager worked which would help to ensure that the University is not overly reliant on a single person.

- b) UEB reviewed risks on a regular basis and it was not anticipated that there would be any significant change in relation to the overarching top 5 risks.

**28/03 AGREED:** that an updated risk register should be presented to the next meeting of the Board.

#### **23/29 ACTIONS FROM STRATEGY AWAY DAY**

**29/01 RECEIVED:** a report of actions from the Strategy Away Day held on 17 October 2023.

**29/02 NOTED:** that five main themes had been considered at the Board Strategy Away Day in relation to Board culture, institutional and school annual review, progress and performance, Generative AI and People and Culture. Details of the work undertaken as a result of the strategy day had been provided and further consideration would be given once the outcomes of the effectiveness review were known.

#### **23/30 MEDICAL EDUCATION UPDATE**

**30/01 RECEIVED:** a presentation from the Vice-Chancellor & President (VC&P) providing an update on medical education.

**30/02 NOTED that:**

- a) the VC&P presented details of the medical education proposition, explaining the rationale, the proposition along with the benefits for the University, identifying potential revenue streams and a clear idea of the costs involved. It was noted that a number of the costs involved had already been approved as part of the £350m master plan investment.
- b) there were two options which had been identified, a partnership model and an independent model. It was felt that it was sensible to continue to investigate both options until the position was known in relation to funded NHS places. It was noted that there was no restriction on the number of international students which could be recruited. Although the independent model would be more expensive up front it was recognised that the partnership model would involve more costs longer term.
- c) it was felt that the details of the medical education proposition were clear and they were aligned to the University strategic objectives. There was support for continuing to take this forward and to investigate both models in order to test how the partnership model would develop. However, it was felt that continuing solely with international students would not align with the original objective of training local doctors to work within the community.
- d) the importance of ensuring that the capital infrastructure was in place was raised together with the capacity to support work placements, as well as the need for study rooms, which can be incorporated into the clinical teaching

spaces, was noted. The development of a community medical centre, including the Hospital and Primary Care Training Hub, and the Stratford Academic New Build investments would require a separate business plan.

- e) it was agreed that the decision on which option to proceed with was of sufficient importance that the decision should lie with the Board, rather than FRC. It was agreed that the two models should continue to be investigated and that medical education should be a standing item on the agenda for Board meetings going forward.
- f) It was agreed to prepare direction of travel NHS England submission although it is not open for submission yet.
- g) the Chair thanked the team for all the work that had gone into the medical education proposal, specifically the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Careers and Enterprise and the Medical Education Project Lead.

**30/03 AGREED:**

- a) to adopt the three-step governance process consisting of (i) evaluating the feasibility of securing hospital placements, (ii) the feasibility of securing NHS places, and (iii) deciding on whether to proceed to recruitment with or without international students for making the final medical education decision, recognising that options need to be as flexible as possible right up to the NHS public call.
- b) to authorise UEB to proceed with securing a full set of placements, determining the nature of the final medical education business model (partnership model or independent with contingency partner) and to prepare the direction of travel for the NHS England submission when it becomes available subject to all final agreements with external parties being brought back to the Board for approval prior to signing.

**23/31 IMPACT AND INNOVATION STRATEGY 2024 - 2028**

**31/01 RECEIVED:** a presentation from the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Impact and Innovation on the Impact and Innovation Strategy for 2024-2028.

**31/02 NOTED:**

- a) it was recognised that research was essentially dependent upon the quality of the researchers and the university needed to focus on particular areas of strength in order to develop and grow.
- b) increased academic participation had led to a more inclusive environment, accompanied by higher QR funding. However, this positive development was accompanied by a decline in the overall Grade Point Average. By 2028, the University's goal was to establish a robust and resilient 3\* 4\* research environment, serving as the foundation for excellent and impactful research

outputs. It was noted that achieving the best possible result for the University in the next Research Excellence Framework (REF) cycle was crucial to (i) building research reputation; (ii) attracting high calibre staff; and (iii) attracting students, especially for postgraduate study/research.

- c) it was recognised that individuals inspired research so it was necessary to create a culture that encouraged staff and students to undertake research. This could involve supporting applications, paying publication charges, and encouraging individuals to attend conferences. It was noted that there were a variety of sources of funding for this both within the University and through external schemes. Funding was also available through KEF and REF initiatives.
- d) linking recruitment and retention strategies and regular monitoring through REF 'Health Checks' to track progress were identified as areas for improvement. It was also proposed to pursue the following initiatives:
- Revising the Academic Progression Framework in order to improve capacity;
  - Implementing a Researcher Development Concordat to promote best practice;
  - Promoting inclusivity in research and aligning this with excellence as part of the approach for REF2028;
  - Establishing PGR Targeted Recruitment combined with an enhanced PGR Experience to improve completion rates in each Unit of Assessment;
  - Implementing a Progression Framework in each of the Institutes, Centre and Groups to create critical mass and to enhance leadership in research;
  - Reviewing the Research Policy Framework and coordinating Marketing and Communication endeavours to improve external visibility;
  - Supporting research-based consultancy to improve engagement.
- e) there was an immediate opportunity to link the forthcoming Year of Science to the I&I Strategy which was based around three objectives: Expert Spotlight; Impact; and Engagement.

**31/03 AGREED:** to approve the Impact and Innovation Strategy 2024-2028 and invite the Pro Vice-Chancellor Impact and Innovation to develop a process for reporting progress against the agreed objectives within the cycle of reporting on Vision 2028.

## **23/32 Q1 FINANCIAL POSITION**

**32/01 RECEIVED:** a report from the Director of Finance on the Q1 financial position.

**32/02 NOTED that:**

- a) overall Semester A recruitment had been a success and, despite national difficulties with domestic undergraduate demand, from which UEL was not exempt, there had been a positive financial start to the new academic year. In

relation to the improvement in undergraduate levels the University was now £3.2m ahead of budget.

- b) the mix of students had however been different from budget. The number of Home students is 10% below the budget. Conversely, new start undergraduate entrants have exceeded the budget by 7%. The emphasis would now be on maximising the levels of retention and ensuring payment was collected from those enrolled. It was noted that a provision of £6.5m had been budgeted to provide for attrition. There would now be a focus on achieving or surpassing Semester B and C target admissions.

### **23/33 DRAFT FINANCIAL STATEMENTS AND AUDITED ACCOUNTS**

**33/01 NOTED:** that the draft financial statements and audited accounts had been considered at both the ARC and FRC meetings. It was anticipated that the accounts would be finalised by the end of 29 November and considered by UEB on 30 November, at which stage they would be made available on Convene and be presented to the Board for approval on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2023.

### **23/34 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE TO THE BOARD AND VICE-CHANCELLOR & PRESIDENT**

**34/01 RECEIVED:** the annual report of the Audit and Risk Committee.

**34/02 NOTED:** that the annual report of the Audit and Risk Committee had been considered by the Audit and Risk Committee, and was recommended to the Board for approval. This report was no longer required to be submitted to the OfS but was submitted for approval by the Board.

**34/03 AGREED:** to approve the annual report of the Audit and Risk Committee.

### **23/35 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE REMUNERATION AND STAFFING COMMITTEE TO THE BOARD AND VICE-CHANCELLOR & PRESIDENT**

**35/01 RECEIVED:** the annual report of the Remuneration and Staffing Committee

**35/02 NOTED:** that the annual report had been considered by the Remuneration and Staffing Committee and was recommended to the Board to approve for publication.

**35/03 AGREED:** to approve the annual report of the Remuneration and Staffing Committee for publication.

### **23/36 ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE PREVENTION OF TERRORISM**

**36/01 RECEIVED:** a report from the University Secretary on the Prevention of Terrorism.

**36/02 NOTED that:**

- a) the annual report for the Prevention of Terrorism had been through ARC which had recommended its submission to the Board and OfS. It was noted that while no speakers were declined the opportunity to speak at the

University, the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act being passed may change the situation going forward.

- b) a review of safeguarding would be undertaken as there had not been one since 2020. It was noted that this coincided with an audit review of safeguarding at the University.
- c) there were no concerns highlighted in relation to vulnerable individuals during the reporting period. It was reported that the engagement between academic staff and professional staff over matters of student well-being was extremely effective and gave every reason to be confident that matters of concern would be raised and acted on. The University Secretary stated that an issue had emerged this term, while outside the reporting period, which demonstrated that the reporting systems were effective.

**36/03 AGREED:** to approve the annual report and assurance statement.

**23/37 RISK MANAGEMENT**

**37/01 NOTED:** that this item had been covered under the risk summary item.

**23/38 ANNUAL REPORT ON THE WORK OF ACADEMIC BOARD**

**38/01 RECEIVED:** an annual report from the Provost on the work of the Academic Board.

**38/02 NOTED that:**

- a) Academic Board had ultimate oversight of the institution in terms of academic standards and quality and how the regulatory body requirements were met. The annual report provided a summary of the activities that were being discussed by the Board in order to provide assurance that the Academic Board had fulfilled its role effectively.
- b) the University had been awarded an overall Silver TEF rating, with gold being achieved in two categories. This was an improvement to the Bronze award when the University was last evaluated in 2018.
- c) the report from the OfS on the outcome of the review into business and management courses was now available. It had been concluded that there were no areas of concerns found. It was noted that a full audit would be undertaken across the University to ensure full compliance with the regulatory body.
- d) the University has a strong background in apprenticeship delivery in a variety of subject area. It was noted that there had been a visit from Ofsted which had resulted in an overall Good rating against all four key areas – quality and education, behaviour and attitudes, personal development and leadership and management.

- e) there was a robust external benchmarking of academic standards which were viewed by the University's external examiners to be consistently high.
- f) there was a system in place to capture the student voice and work was continuing to develop a positive relationship with students. It was noted that there were also a student representative on a number of committees.
- g) the degree outcome statement provided an overview of the credibility of the University's academic qualifications to ensure that they were maintained at the highest possible standards. It was noted that the data showed that the award of good honours degrees was at 74%, with 33.6% at first class. This was broadly in line with the sector.
- h) an effectiveness review of Academic Board had been undertaken and a set of recommendations identified to be undertaken in three phases. It was confirmed that these had now been completed.
- i) the Chair of the Board advised that arrangements had been made for an independent governor to attend an Academic Board meeting in April 2024, but would like, if possible, for an independent governor to attend each of the meetings. It was agreed that the University Secretary and Governance Manager would liaise with the independent governors to encourage volunteers.

**38/03 AGREED:** that the University Secretary and Governance Manager would liaise with the independent governors to encourage volunteers to attend future meetings of Academic Board.

**23/39 ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE STUDENTS' UNION**

**39/01 RECEIVED:** the annual report of the Students' Union activities for 2022/23.

**39/02 NOTED that:**

- a) the report covered the period from 1 August 2022 – 31 July 2023 which highlighted the successes and challenges of the Students' Union in the 2022/23 academic year.
- b) the elections had taken place in Spring 2023, and it was noted that the participation in these elections had resulted in the highest number of voters for several years, with over 3000 students voting. It was noted that there were fewer candidates, but the candidates were of a better quality.
- c) in relation to events and activities, it was noted that there had been a reduction in online activities post pandemic and a return to in-person activity. The main objective was to increase the sense of belonging among students and to help students make friends. It was noted that separate welcome weeks were offered for education and nursing students who start their courses



earlier than others and had previously not been offered specific welcome programmes.

- d) the new student space at Stratford was now open which included a reception desk, a seating area and a multi-purpose room as part of phase one. Phase two would include a kitchen/microwave area, advice/consultation rooms, however, although work had not started on this phase, it was anticipated that it would be completed by Spring 2024.
- e) the newly created Performance Assurance Group had held its first meeting and the Student Experience Group was due to meet shortly. It was noted that it was felt that this had been a useful process and it had been helpful to have open and honest conversations.

#### **23/40 CHAIR'S BUSINESS**

**40/01 NOTED:** that there was no Chair's business.

#### **23/41 GOVERNANCE EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW UPDATE**

**41/01 NOTED:** that Advance HE had observed a number of meetings and were half way through the programme of interviews. It was anticipated that the field work would be completed prior to Christmas, and that the final e report would be available in February 2024.

#### **23/42 APPOINTMENT OF THE CHAIR OF THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS 2024/25**

**42/01 RECEIVED:** a report from the University Secretary on the appointment of the Chair of the Board of Governors from 2024/25.

**42/02 NOTED:** that the process and the timetable for the appointment of the Chair had been considered by the Governance and Search Committee. It was noted that it was proposed to advertise the role externally, but internal candidates were welcomed. It was noted that the University Secretary would be engaging with search consultants in relation to the recruitment of Board members, but not for the Chair as this had not proved a good use of resources previously.

**42/03 AGREED:** the proposed process and timetable for the appointment of the Chair.

#### **23/43 UPDATE ON THE APPOINTMENT OF THE CHANCELLOR**

**43/01 NOTED that:**

- a) the Governance and Search Committee had reviewed a list of candidates, but the Committee felt that one candidate was exceptional.
- b) it was considered that this proposed nominee had been outstanding at the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations and had proved himself to be knowledgeable and sincere. He was well connected both politically and commercially and it

was felt that he was a good fit for the university. Approval was accordingly sought from the Board to approach this individual.

**43/03 AGREED:** to approach the individual.

**23/44 USE OF THE CORPORATIONS'S SEAL**

**44/01 NOTED:** that the Corporation's Seal has not been used since the last meeting of the Board.

**23/45 DATES OF MEETINGS**

**45/01 NOTED:** the dates of meetings for 2023/24

5 December 2023 (via Teams)

20 February 2024

26/27 March 2024

21 May 2024

9 July 2024