

**UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON HIGHER EDUCATION CORPORATION**

**BOARD OF GOVERNORS**

**Minutes of the Board of Governors held on 20 February 2024**

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

**In attendance:** Hassan Abdalla (Provost), Matt Bellgard (PVC, Impact and Innovation), Jim Benson (University Secretary), Joseph Cooper (Director of People and Culture), Vanessa Varvas (Chief Marketing Officer).

**Officer:** Ceren Alver (Compliance Officer)

**Apologies:** No apologies

**23/51 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

**51/01 NOTED:** that there were no declarations of interest.

**23/52 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 18 NOVEMBER 2023**

**52/01 RECEIVED and CONFIRMED:** the minutes of the meeting held on 18 November 2023.

**23/53 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 5 DECEMBER 2023**

**53/01 RECEIVED and CONFIRMED:** the minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2023.

**23/54 MATTERS ARISING**

**54/01 RECEIVED:** a report from the Compliance Officer on matters arising from previous meetings.

**54/02 NOTED:** the importance of Board Members attending a meeting of Academic Board was emphasised.

**23/55 REPORT OF BUSINESS DISCUSSED AT STANDING COMMITTEES**

**55/01 RECEIVED:** a report from the Compliance Officer on business discussed at standing committees.

**55/02 NOTED that:** the Governance and Search Committee had shortlisted 8-10 candidates for the vacancies to occur in the Board of Governors.

**23/56 RISK SUMMARY**

**56/01 RECEIVED:** a risk summary from the University Secretary.

**56/02 NOTED that:**

- a) an interim risk manager was appointed who had updated the Risk Summary. Student recruitment, both home and international, were identified as one of the top concerns at the forefront of the list of individual risks. The interim risk manager would be updating the risk summary on quarterly basis.
- b) the risks in relation to the government policies, the economic environment and international recruitment had emerged as University's top risk although this had not been properly assessed. The assessment in this regard would take place before the next three-monthly review was produced.

**23/57 UPDATE BY THE VICE-CHANCELLOR & PRESIDENT**

**57/01 RECEIVED:** a presentation from the Vice-Chancellor & President (VC&P) providing an update on the current environment in which the University was operating.

**57/02 NOTED that:**

- a) There had been a considerable amount of media coverage in recent months about matters relating to higher education, occurring almost every week since Christmas, with nearly all being negative. A question was raised regarding the extent to which the university had challenged such negative coverage, especially where it was inaccurate. It was noted that the recent coverage about the international university admissions was evidently not fact based and had been widely challenged at sector, regional and institutional level.

The importance of responding to media coverage, particularly when it was inaccurate, with an evidence-based approach was emphasised. It was noted that an ongoing effort to enhance engagement in the public space (i.e. VCP blog) with a multi-channel approach had been employed to address the issue. The importance of actively campaigning and presenting the impact of international students on the UK's economy was underlined.

- b) The discussion points from the October 2023 Strategy session were reflected upon. Global, sectoral, and local trends and contexts affecting higher education were elaborated. It was recognised that the University was operating in some of the most volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous times for higher education. Geopolitical instability, UK

economics, cost of living crisis and geographic market share as well as the changing attitudes of the young people towards higher education should all have taken into account while revisiting the Vision 2028.

The stagnation of UG regulated fees was expected to continue, posing increasing problems when compounded by rising inflation. It was projected that 2024 national UGT applications would not grow. Major national disruptions to international recruitment market such as removal of dependents from visas, unwelcoming media coverage, a negative political environment, and exchange rate turbulence in places such as Nigeria had been impacting the sector significantly. Increased TPS employer contribution and industrial action were also noted as matters of concern. It was noted that the current state of global volatility and uncertainty underscored the importance of diversification in international student recruitment.

- c) The goals for 2028 were summarised: to increase the average entry tariff to 112.5 from 102.4; the ranking to 46<sup>th</sup> from 96<sup>th</sup> in the Guardian University Guide; Research Grant Income to £6.4m from £2.1m by 2028 and achieving a TEF Gold rating were some of the goals for 2028.
- d) It was noted that the sector benchmarking indicators always lagged a minimum of one year. This delay was attributed to the longer-term impact of interventions in higher education. In consideration of the changing environment in higher education, it was proposed to revise the institutional KPIs. This revision would involve reducing Surplus as a Percentage of Total Income from 3% to 2%, which would still be above the sector average, while increasing total income from £200m to £400m. It was noted that this revision would enable investment to continue which would be necessary to navigate the ever-increasing challenges shaping the HE sector. It was noted that illustrating the tangible aspects of the performance indicators in the March Strategy meeting would be helpful to understand where the university was in the journey towards Vision 2028.
- e) The current size of the Schools, along with the projections for 2028 were presented for consideration. Questions were raised about the decline in the size of specific schools, such as the School of Educom, between 2018 and 2024. It was noted that each school had its own local academic strategy in place and analysis of UCAS data had been helpful to identify areas for growth and explore new disciplines with potential for growth. It was noted that efforts were ongoing to address the downturn trend, particularly focusing on interdisciplinary programmes that were in demand in international markets. The option of reducing operational costs, specifically by reducing the number of the courses offered and focusing on fewer programmes, was also recognised.

- f) The Vision 2028: 2024-2028 direction of travel was introduced, which was outlined under four strategic objectives: The Future Graduate, The Future of Professional, Future Life and Our Sustainability. It was noted that the purpose of the sub-strategy was to articulate on the brand reputation and how they would be linked with the wider strategy.

The proposed over-arching aims included four main objectives: (i) providing an empowering and socially-just education, anchored in an inclusive student experience driven by health, compassion and belonging, (ii) establishing the university as 1st choice for employers, entrepreneurs and problem-solvers in accessing creativity-led 5.0 talent for a healthier, happier, greener & fairer world, (iii) establishing the university as the leading modern University for research, impact and knowledge exchange that connects communities and industry through innovative partnerships, to proactively drive health gain, dismantle inequalities, and deliver sustainable changes toward a secure world in a rapidly evolving digital age, and (iv) The 1st choice, largest, modern, Net Zero, Glocal University in the UK: A green & healthy, 5.0-ready environment of success for all.

**57/03 AGREED:**

- a) to approve the revised Vision 2028 goals, and
- b) to approve the direction of travel of strategic plans, recognising the required impact on Governance, Culture and investment.

**23/58 UPDATE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF MEDICAL EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY**

**58/01 RECEIVED:** a presentation from the VC&P providing an update on medical education and Land to West development project.

**58/02 NOTED:**

- a) The land to the west of the Docklands campus had been taken over by DPK following the bankruptcy of the initial owners. A Public Information Notice was due to be issued by the Royal Docks Corporation Management Team on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2024, inviting any interested party to participate. The development plan excluded residential buildings and had a focus on hospitality and leisure projects, as well as sport-related ventures. The University had to be mindful of the possibility of the land being used for purposes that could have adverse consequences such as waste disposal. It was deliberated whether the university would directly be involved in the Royal Docks Corporation with all bidders being required to engage with the university or act through a third-party master planning consortium that was under direction of the University.
- b) The VC&P provided an update on the Medical Education proposition. It was noted that there was a strong desire to collaborate and establish a long-term relationship regarding medical education and related health programmes with a partner institution. However, it was noted that

addressing the current limited placement capacity of the Barts Health Group would require significant changes in current working practices.

- c) It was noted that there was a growing demand for locally employed doctors seeking training, including support for the Portfolio Pathway programmes. Furthermore, there was a need for innovation in health simulation-based training. It was highlighted that at the moment 95% of the medical education placements in the UK were hospital placements and there were very few GP, care home or school placements. It was clear, however, that community-based experiences, preventative treatments, and management of long-term illnesses were in demand. It was noted that there was no university community health centre model in UK. However, innovating new models within GMC regulations would be challenging.

## **23/59 A GLOCAL GATEWAY – THE GLOBAL FAMILY TODAY & IN 2028**

**59/01 RECEIVED:** a presentation from the Pro Vice-Chancellor providing an update on Glocal Gateway.

**59/02 NOTED that:**

- a) Transnational Education (TNE), which was delivered outside the UK, constituted a major part of the UK's higher education provision. According to the most recent year data available from 2021/22, - there were 558,000 TNE students studying at 160 UK universities and UEL was in the top 10% of all TNE providers. TNE was initially encouraged by the Government for economic reasons and because it promoted the British values and culture. By 2028, the proportion of students studying with UEL partners in the UK and Overseas (UG & PGT) should increase from approximately 33% in 2018 to 50%. There were various models of TNE delivery, each carrying different levels of risk and reward. UEL had opted for a low-risk model, where all TNE provision had been delivered by selected partners in key markets, known as UEL's GLOCAL Family. In this model the University did not own any asset or faculty and the education was mostly delivered through UEL alumnus.
- b) In response to a question regarding how UEL maintained quality of education, it was explained that GLOCAL operated under a comprehensive quality assurance regime, which replicated practices in the UK with added layers of protection. This included ensuring consistency in all exams, exam boards, and external examiners with UK standards and practices. UEL partners were subject to the same quality assurance process as if they were in the UK. UK partnerships were regulated through the OfS with student performance reflected in UEL's data dashboard and League Tables. Overseas partners were not regulated through the OfS and student performance were not reflected in UEL's data dashboard.
- c) In response to a question regarding how it was ensured that UEL's partners did not compete with UEL, it was explained that the risk was mitigated through UEL's global activity ensuring that UEL provided added value

whether it was through Career Zone or global exchange of faculty and students. All UEL Students, including all TNE Students studying UG Franchised programmes, study UEL's Award-winning Mental Wealth & Professional Fitness Curriculum.

## **23/60 Q2 FINANCIAL POSITION**

**60/01 RECEIVED:** a presentation from the Pro Vice-Chancellor providing an update on the Q2 financial performance.

### **60/02 NOTED that:**

- a) YTD income of £232.3m was over the forecasted Q1 forecast to date, primarily driven by the non-tuition income seasonal activities. Staff expenditure was below budget but offset by an overspend on agency staff. The cash balance was slightly below the Q1 forecast although remained above budget for 2023/24. Commercial debt had significantly increased compared to the prior month. This was due to a UEL partner attempting to terminate a contract. The partner in question was a provider for apprenticeship programmes to the Metropolitan Police. The attempt to terminate the partnership was as a result of the drop in applications to the programme following the Home Secretary's announcement that the Metropolitan Police would revert to traditional police training methods instead of degree apprenticeship programmes.
- b) The forecast for the full year had recently been updated. The budget for the full year had been £271m, whereas the forecast was now £278m. It was likely that operating expenses would increase by a similar amount, resulting in a 1% surplus income. Although there were challenges on the horizon, no issues of concern were flagged at present.

## **23/61 REPORT OF BUSINESS DISCUSSED AT ACADEMIC BOARD ON 8 NOVEMBER 2023**

**61/01 RECEIVED:** report from the Academic Board providing information on business discussed at the Academic Board meeting on 8 November 2023.

### **61/02 NOTED that:**

- a) the Academic Board Terms and Reference and Membership were reviewed, and the Academic Registrar was to be added to the membership.
- b) significant progress had been made against the Academic Board Effectiveness Review recommendations which were implemented across the three phases. As part of Phase 3 an agenda for an Academic Board Induction programme had been drawn up in order to train members in their role and this would be rolled out in the near future.

- c) University achieved a Silver rating in the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) which included two Gold rating areas in completion and student success.
- d) the new quality reviews were designed to provide oversight of how each School and courses within each subject grouping met or exceeded UEL expectations and OfS Regulatory requirements. The School of Psychology had recently undergone its first audit, and staff had supported the exercise with enthusiasm) A full OFSTED inspection of UEL apprenticeships was conducted in September 2023 and UEL received a 'Good' OFSTED rating against all four key areas.
- e) the 2022/23 Board of Governor Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for the Graduate Progression result for 2020/21 cohort was 84%, which was 1% below the target of 85%, and was equal to the score of last year's 2019/20 cohort.

## **23/62 CHAIR'S BUSINESS**

**62/01 NOTED that:** a motion received from the UCU regarding the definition of International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) proposed its reconsideration at the upcoming academic board meeting. It was noted that all statements and policies were to be reviewed as part of an annual update. The role of the ethics committee, particularly in matters concerning free speech and sexual harassment was highlighted as potentially becoming more significant.

**62/02 AGREED:** that an agenda item regarding the definition of IHRA be added to the agenda of the next Ethics Advisory Committee meeting and VC&P be invited to the next meeting for her input on this matter.

## **23/63 GOVERNANCE EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW UPDATE**

**63/01 RECEIVED:** a report from the University Secretary and the Final Report from the Advance HE on the governance effectiveness review.

**63/02 NOTED that:** the Government & Search Committee would provide a substantive response and plan on how Advance HE's recommendations should be adopted. There would be an opportunity to discuss the report in detail with the owner of the report in the next meeting.

**63/03 AGEED to:** approve the principles of the Governance Effectiveness Report subject to further discussions in the next meeting.

## **23/64 SEXUAL MISCONDUCT AND HARASSMENT ADVISORY GROUP-REPORT OF ACTIVITIES IN 2022/23**

**64/01 RECEIVED:** a report from the University Secretary on the activities of the Sexual Misconduct and Harassment Advisory Group.

**64/02 NOTED that:**

- a) the Sexual Misconduct and Harassment Advisory Group (SMHAG) was formed in March 2023 as it was agreed there needed to be a body to advise both UEB and the Board of Governors on how the University should respond to the OfS proposals to make sexual misconduct and harassment a Condition of Registration. The report on activities in 2022/23 covered the work that the SMHAG has undertaken since its formation. Other SMHAG activities demonstrated how the University's activities met the commitments set out in the Statement of Expectations in relation to Harassment, Bullying and Sexual Misconduct.
- b) some universities had started to disclose the details of the incidents however, it was agreed that this practice might be uncomfortable for the survivors.
- c) The question of whether the TNE students would be subject to the new regulation was raised. It was noted that while the consultation made it clear that the Condition of Registration would apply to partner institutions, there was uncertainty regarding how it would work in practice. It was noted that the complaints procedure as well as report and support services were all available to the TNE students.

**64/03 AGREED:** to approve the Appendix B statement of Expectations.

**23/65 RESPONSE TO OFS CONSULTATIONS: FREE SPEECH COMPLAINTS SCHEME; REGULATING STUDENTS' UNIONS ON FREE SPEECH MATTERS**

**65/01 RECEIVED:** a proposal response for the OfS Consultation for the Freedom of Speech Complaints Scheme from the University Secretary.

**65/02 NOTED that:**

- a) Legislation on freedom of speech, passed in May 2023, granted OfS more powers and duties to regulate universities and colleges, and their students' unions, on free speech issues. The Act imposed new duties on the University and its partner institutions in relation to freedom of speech and academic freedom, and on their constituent institutions.
- b) the OfS launched two consultations on 14 December 2023 in relation to free speech. One concerned the new free speech complaints scheme, the deadline for this consultation was 10 March 2024. There was a second consultation on regulating students' unions on free speech matters, the deadline for this consultation was 17 March 2024.
- c) institutions currently had been dealing with conflicting issues and competing priorities. It was not clear if the guidance for implementation of the scheme would consider the Equality Act 2010 and existing guidance, particularly from the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), as



these were not referenced during the consultation. It was noted that while complaints should be dealt with in a timely manner, resolving them within 30 days could be limiting in certain cases.

**65/03 AGREED:**

- a) to approve the proposed response to the consultation questions set out in Annex A and Annex C with a slight amendment regarding the 30-day timeframe.
- b) that the Ethics Advisory Committee be convened in March 2024 to consider the issues raised in these proposals and advise the Board further about this matter at its meeting on 27th March 2024.

**23/66 UPDATE ON THE APPOINTMENT OF THE CHAIR OF THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS, 2024/2025**

**66/01 NOTED:** that the interviews with the candidates for the chair position would be held by the Governance and Search Committee on 11<sup>th</sup> March and the recommendations of the committee would be presented to the Board on 27<sup>th</sup> March.

**23/67 UPDATE ON THE APPOINTMENT OF THE CHANCELLOR**

**67/01 NOTED:** that a third target was approached but the level of interest from the target had yet to be ascertained. It was noted that the Governance and Search Committee's focus was on finding the right person for the role, even if it resulted in not appointing the Chancellor in time for the Graduation Ceremonies in September 2024

**23/68 USE OF THE CORPORATION'S SEAL**

**68/01 NOTED:** that the Corporation's Seal has not been used since the last meeting of the Board.

**23/69 TO NOTE THE DATES OF MEETINGS OF THE BOARD FOR 2023/24**

**69/01 NOTED:** that the dates of meetings for 2023/24 were as follows:

26/27 March 2024

21 May 2024

9 July 2024.