

**CONFIRMED**

**UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON HIGHER EDUCATION CORPORATION**

**BOARD OF GOVERNORS**

**Minutes of the Board of Governors held on Tuesday 24 March 2021 via Teams**

**Present:** Anulika Ajufo (Chair), Ismail Amla, Amanda Broderick (Vice-Chancellor & President), Jackie Craissati, Adam Doyle, Insia Durrani, Les Ebdon, Regina Everitt, John Garwood, Bindi Karia, Michael Nartey, Doris Olulode, Naveen Pradeep, Gary Stewart and Janette Withey

**In attendance:** Jim Benson (University Secretary), Verity Brown (PVC Impact and Innovation), Dean Curtis (DVC & Chief Finance Officer), Paul Marshall (PVC Careers and Enterprise), Ian Pickup (Chief Operating Officer) and Vanessa Varvas (Chief Marketing Officer)

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

**Apologies:** Mottie Kessler and Tommy MacDonnell

**20/69 NOTICE OF INTENTION TO SPEAK TO STARRED ITEMS**

**69/01 NOTED:** that no items had been unstarred.

**20/70 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

**20/71 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 2 FEBRUARY 2021**

**71/01 RECEIVED and CONFIRMED:** the minutes of the Board of Governors' meeting held on 2 February 2021.

**20/72 MATTERS ARISING**

**72/01 NOTED that:**

Process for the appointment of a Chair

The Governance and Search Committee would be meeting on 6 April 2021 to consider the process for the appointment of the Chair of the Board with a view to presenting this to the Board on 25 May 2021.

Board Strategy Session

The Board Strategy Session had been arranged for 7 April 2021 at 5 pm.

### Partnership Presentation

It was confirmed that the presentation on partnerships would be made to the meeting of the Board on 25 May 2021.

### Standing Orders

The Standing Orders had been drafted and would be considered by the Board.

### Prevent

The actions in relation to Prevent were due later in the year, however, it was noted that OfS were reviewing the process and this would be discussed by the Prevent Working Group and the Audit and Risk Committee due to be held on 11 May 2021.

### National Student Survey

The Board had requested qualitative comments from students, together with course leader responses to negative comments and the overall drop in satisfaction comparing 2019 to 2020 results, which were collected as part of the survey. The most positive commentary received related to teaching and academic support, whilst the negative commentary also related to teaching as well as organisational matters e.g. timetabling.

The information collected had been used to identify specific courses where there was a need for rapid improvement. Action plans had been developed and were monitored to ensure that the improvements required were put in place.

Although it was noted that the NSS would not continue in its current format, the data being collected for NSS 2021 would be used to address areas of concern raised.

The potential need for a customer service ethos was raised in order to help improve satisfaction levels as well as a "You Said, We Did" campaign.

It was noted that the comments from students covered areas such as student safety, acceptance and equality. The concern for safety was not related to the teaching experience, but it was an area which the University needed to be aware of and take action.

A request was made for more information to be provided as to how the academic strategy would improve the student experience and this should be considered at the next meeting of the Board under matters arising.

A query was raised regarding the impact of the dual delivery model on the attainment gap and it was noted that the data showed that the degree awarding gap had reduced from 21% to 13%. It was expected that this would be maintained as it was recognised that the changes which had been implemented as a result of the pandemic had made the position more inclusive.

**72/01 AGREED:** that information should be provided on how the academic strategy helps to improve the student experience to be presented at the next meeting of the Board of Governors under matters arising.

**20/73 REPORT ON BUSINESS DISCUSSED AT STANDING COMMITTEES**

**73/01 RECEIVED:** a report from the Governance Manager on the business discussed at standing committees.

**73/02 NOTED that:**

- a) the Audit and Risk Committee had considered a report on cyber-security and noted that there were a number of recommendations which had been identified, which would be monitored and followed up.
- b) the Finance and Resources Committee had considered and approved the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and the TRAC return at their meeting held on 23 February 2021.
- c) the Governance and Search Committee had considered the internal audit on governance. It was noted that the recommendations contained within the reports had been addressed, however, matters that focused on Board behaviour and culture would by their very nature remain under constant consideration.
- d) Academic Board had considered a policy on how to deal with sexual violence on campus as our current complaints procedure was not drafted to cope with such issues. The new procedure would ensure that issues were dealt with more effectively and sensitively in future. Consideration was also given to the adoption of the IHRA definition of antisemitism. The issue had been referred to the Ethics Advisory Committee for further consideration. There was no objection to adopting the definition, however, there was a need to engage widely across the university to ensure that the community was comfortable with the position ultimately adopted. The key concern related to defining one specific protected group, when others were not. It was noted that the recommendation would be presented to the Board of Governors' in due course.

**20/74 REPORT FROM THE MEETINGS OF THE TRANSFORMATION COMMITTEE**

**74/01 RECEIVED:** a report from the Governance Manager on the business discussed at standing committees.

**74/02 NOTED that:**

the Transformation Projects Committee (TPC) had considered the business cases for the Digital First Transformation Programme and Carbon Zero. It had been agreed at the meeting to put the business case for Digital 1st to the Board at its meeting on 23 March 2021. There was concern raised that the business

case had not been considered by the Finance and Resources Committee prior to being presented to the Board, although the Chair of FRC had agreed that this was pragmatically the best approach to adopt. The business case had been provided to members of FRC for consideration and whilst it was not ideal the timing of the meetings had resulted in the decision being made to present the business case directly to the Board due to the urgency of the project. It was noted that FRC was due to take place on 6 April 2021 and it was agreed that the *committee should have oversight of the implementation of the project. It was also agreed that that in future TPC would meet to consider proposals prior to them being considered by the Finance and Resources Committee.*

**74/03 AGREED:** the Finance and Resources Committee to have oversight of the implementation of the Digital 1<sup>st</sup> project.

**20/75 TRANSFORMATION PROJECT COMMITTEE – DIGITAL FIRST TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME BUSINESS CASE**

**75/01 RECEIVED:** a report from the Governance Manager on the business discussed at standing committees.

**75/02 NOTED that:**

- a) the Digital 1<sup>st</sup> project aimed to change the digital infrastructure. It was anticipated that the transition to the cloud would be completed by the end of July 2021. Work would then need to be undertaken in order to bring the benefits of the cloud environment to staff and students. The prioritisation of Digital 1<sup>st</sup> would allow core systems including finance, HR and student administration to be dealt with much sooner, which would help to achieve improvements in data integration and reduce multi-inputs of data. The action plan had been developed which would fast track some changes to make an impact at the start of the new academic year. The cash call in the current financial year would be approximately £2m. It was agreed that a video on the benefits of Digital 1<sup>st</sup> should be sent to governors for information.
- b) a governance structure had been developed to ensure that the project was well managed, risks were identified and mitigated against and remained on track. It was noted that each element of the project had a structure and would need to meet the governance plan and would require sign off by the executive.
- c) it was recognised that the transition to the cloud environment would improve the student experience. It was important to identify what could be undertaken quickly to achieve benefit realisation, however, it was

important that a balance was found to avoid issues regarding affordability and to ensure that the University was not overwhelmed by the changes.

- d) the draft costs and benefit analysis had taken into account cost reduction potential, reductions in data collection in input, eradication of duplicate systems and the impact on the costs of operating the new system from a technology perspective. The biggest contribution back to the university was the ability to recruit more students and retain them as they progressed through their programme.
- e) in terms of competitive advantage, it was noted that across the sector future investment plans were becoming more digital focused and there had been a change to recognise the essential nature of digital. UEL were trying to gain a competitive advantage by moving forward more quickly than our competitors.

**75/03 AGREED:**

- a) The video on Digital 1<sup>st</sup> to be sent to governors.
- b) To approve the expenditure of £5m for the Digital 1<sup>st</sup> Transformation Programme.

**20/76 REPORT BY THE VICE-CHANCELLOR & PRESIDENT**

**76/01 RECEIVED:** a presentation from the Vice-Chancellor & President.

**76/02 NOTED that:**

- a) the annual planning round had just commenced and the University was in a strong and robust position when thinking about priorities. A discussion had taken place with the Board at their meeting in October and a number of priorities had been highlighted including the careers-1<sup>st</sup> mission, student inclusion and empowerment, increasing the economic and social impact of the University and driving up performance on core academic indicators, as well as health and wellbeing.
- b) there are four strategic objectives and priorities. Progress had been made with the cross-institutional priorities, however, it had been slower due to the pandemic. It was also recognised that these priorities would be impacted by government policy making, student demand, the advancement of Vision 2028 and the impact on staff and student well-being.
- c) the focus for 2021/22 was to accelerate opportunity with our careers-1<sup>st</sup> mission being a priority as well as increasing both the quality and quantity of partnerships, transforming our digital-1<sup>st</sup> head start position into benefits, driving up performance on core academic indicators, delivering green enterprise and provide healthy lives and workplaces.

- d) the annual planning round would look to set financial performance targets for 2021/22, to set academic and service performance indicators aligned with the institutional dashboard, to develop dual delivery 2.0, to deliver the priority transformation and facilitation projects and to provide a view beyond the immediate position to 2022/23 and 2023/24.

## **20/77 SCHOOL PRESENTATION**

**77/01 RECEIVED:** a presentation from the Dean of the School of Health, Sport and BioScience.

## **20/78 GUIDANCE FOR PROVIDERS ABOUT STUDENT AND CONSUMER PROTECTION DURING THE PANDEMIC**

**78/01 RECEIVED:** a report from the University Secretary on OfS regulation during Covid-19.

**75/02 NOTED that:**

- a) the Board was advised that it was required to approve the University's response to the letter of 14 January 2021 from the Office for Students (OfS) on regulation during the current phase of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. A review had been conducted on the University's compliance with consumer law from the start of term until the end of the first half of the spring term 2021 and a projection of the arrangements until the end of the year to ensure compliance with ongoing condition C1 -guidance on consumer protection law. University was required by OfS to put in place arrangements to show that we had maintained our academic standards and delivered to our students what had been promised and any remedial action. It was not a requirement to submit this detail to the OfS, although there would be an inspection if they were to receive any complaints or if they considered that there had been a breach of the conditions of registration.
- b) the Board were satisfied with the recommendations set out in the paper. A reference was made with regard to the wellbeing and counselling and it was suggested that a committee should monitor how many people were applying for counselling and what the wait times were.

**75/03 AGREED:** that the Board were satisfied with the actions being taken in relation to compliance with the existing regulatory requirements.

## **20/78 ACADEMIC WORKLOAD BRIEFING**

**78/01 RECEIVED:** a report from the Provost on academic workload.

**78/02 NOTED that:**

- a) the workload allocation model would be used to facilitate the duties and responsibilities within a school being allocated in an equitable manner in line with the National Academic Contract Agreement, to support staff health and well-being in managing priorities and support both individual career progression objectives and institutional performance objectives.
- b) there had been a number of constructive meetings with UCU members and in addition all Schools had led local consultation to ensure that the process was fully inclusive as it was recognised that not all members of staff were members of the UCU.
- c) the proposed model was in line with the sector and our academic contracts were aligned to the national framework.
- d) a meeting which was due to take place today had not gone ahead and had been rescheduled. It was anticipated that the consultation would end by the end of March 2021, but if necessary would be extended in order to ensure that we had engaged fully with union members.

## **20/79 MENTAL HEALTH PROVISION**

**79/01 RECEIVED:** a presentation from the Deputy Director of HR and the Head of Student Support and Wellbeing on our mental health provision.

**78/02 NOTED:** that there was approval on the approach to mental wellbeing for both staff and students and it was acknowledged that work had been undertaken to ensure that students were able to access the student wellbeing service and to reduce waiting times for those students. It was suggested that it would be useful to track the use of the service to ensure that the work being undertaken was having an impact.

**78/03 AGREED:** to provide data on the numbers of students accessing the student wellbeing service, either referred or self-referred, and present to the next meeting of the Board of Governors under matters arising.

## **20/80 THE FOLLOWING AGENDA ITEMS WERE DEFERRED TO THE NEXT MEETING OF THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS:**

Financial Position 2020/21

Articles of Government, Financial Regulations and Scheme of Delegation

Annual Report on Student Complaints and Appeals  
Report on Risk Management  
Effectiveness Review of Academic Board  
Draft Schedule of meetings for the forthcoming academic year

**20/81 ANNUAL CYCLE OF BUSINESS**

**81/01 RECEIVED and NOTED:** the annual cycle of business.

**20/82 USE OF THE CORPORATION'S SEAL**

**82/01 NOTED:** that the Corporation's seal has not been used since the last meeting of the Board held on 2 February 2021.

**20/83 DATES OF MEETINGS**

**83/01 NOTED:** that the dates of meetings for 2020/21 were as follows:

25 May 2021

6 July 2021

**SIGNED:** .....  
**Chair of the Board of Governors**

**DATED:** .....