

BOARD OF GOVERNORS MEETING

Minutes of the Board of Governors meeting held on Wednesday 20 September 2023 from 4pm to 7pm.

Present

Andrew Summers (Chair)
Richard Bee (Independent)
Andy Cook (Vice-Chancellor)
Esther Gbogboade (Acting President of Student Union)
Lizbeth Goodman (Co-opted)
Kate Gregory (Independent)
Chiz Nwaosu (Professional Services Staff Member) (online)
Paul O'Grady (Independent)
Alberto Villanueva (Academic Staff Member)
Noeline Sanders (Independent)
Lisa Stansbie (Co-opted)
Lee Wilkinson (Independent) (online)

In attendance

Christopher Costigan – University Secretary and Director of Strategic Delivery
Tony Croudass – Director of IT
Karen Ingram – Director of People and Culture
Lawrence Lartey – Director of Innovation, Industry and Enterprise
Phil MacDonald – Director of Finance
Andy Rees – Dean
Simon Robertshaw – Deputy Vice-Chancellor
Emma Shailer – Chief Operating Officer

Ceewhy Ochoga – Student Union Manager (item 6 only)
Dan Janowski – Head of Strategic Recruitment Partnerships (item 7 only)

Keith Bartlett – Board Effectiveness Review Consultant (AdvanceHE)

Apologies

Zaid Al-Zaidy (Independent)
Shoku Amirani (Independent)
Penny Haughan (Co-opted)
Markos Koumaditis (Independent)
Stephen Woodford (Independent)

Actions

REDACTED

	CHAIR'S WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS
23/80	The Chair welcomed members to the meeting. Apologies were received from Shoku Amirani, Zaid Al-Zaidy, Penny Haughan, Markos Koumaditis and Stephen Woodford. The Chair welcomed Keith Bartlett from AdvanceHE, who was observing the meeting as a part of the board effectiveness review.
	DEEP DIVE
23/81	<p>Governors reported back on the main themes from the deep dive into the work of the academic operations team. Key takeaways reported included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That the team was relatively new and covered significant portions of the student journey and had recently been restructured to ensure it was fit for purpose and could offer a more coherent offer to students. • That the team would like to expand to also support student success and attainment, but that was a longer-term plan. • Significant energy had been put into ensuring attendance tracking worked well and was robust for UKVI purposes. • That keeping up to date with technology developments (e.g. in Kit Store) was a key issue the team faced. • Ensuring systems spoke to each other was vital to ensuring a smooth student experience. • The library was an important student space, but some gaps existed because of recent changes whilst awaiting R3. • That space was a key challenge this semester, with some rooms running at 100% occupancy. • How vital it was that students knew who to talk to if they had an issue (e.g. their timetable or how to book a break out room). • The positive steps the timetabling team took to work in partnership with academic colleagues in the booking of spaces to ensure they were fit for purpose. • That the team felt engaged, valued and listened to.
23/82	In discussion, the executive noted the team had only been in place a year and the results of the new approach were starting to bear results, for instance around student communication and attendance monitoring. The desire also to support success and attainment was noted, with the new role of 'Learning Achievement Advisor', which had been recently created, being seen as central to that ambition.
23/83	The impact of not yet having R3 was noted, with some pinch points around library, although better use by students of R2 was seen as critical to mitigate this. More broadly, it was felt that rather than recreate the old library once R3 came on board, consideration needed to be given to what a library of the future looked like and what the 10-year vision for the library might be.
23/84	The importance of considering the support structure from the student perspective was emphasized, with the intention to create a 'one-stop shop' helpdesk who could triage to other services reported. It was further noted that the University offered services over and above what would be available at other universities (e.g. IT support), but the benefit was not always fully communicated.
23/85	The Chair thanked the academic operations team for their services to students and extended a particular thanks to those who had participated in the deep dive.
23/86	Finally, the Board reflected on the pre-board tour of the new R3 building. Its condition and adaptability were particularly noted, and the sense of connection with Ravensbourne through being able to see R1 through the windows was felt to be very valuable in creating a sense of community across locations.

	DECLARATION OF INTERESTS
23/87	Members were reminded to declare any interests, personal or financial, that might relate to the business shown on the agenda for the meeting. No additional declarations were made.
	MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING
23/88	The minutes of the Board of Governors meeting held on 26 July 2023 were approved, subject to a change to the paragraph numbering and appropriate redactions being put in place.
	CHAIR'S UPDATE
23/89	The Chair noted that the board was currently undertaking a board effectiveness review and that a questionnaire had been circulated by the University Secretary for governors and the executive to complete. The Chair urged anyone who had not yet completed it to complete it by the deadline on 26 September.
23/90	The recent review of the OfS by the House of Lords Industry and Regulators Committee was introduced, highlighting major issues regarding how the regulator was conducting itself, including its relationship with its stakeholders, politicisation of the organisation, the burden placed on providers and the potential for a financial crisis in the sector.
23/91	Further, it was reported the OfS had recently released the first of its 'boots on the ground' reviews into business courses at London Southbank and Bolton. Whilst no issues had been found at Southbank, areas of concern had been identified with Bolton's provision. It was felt this was a demonstration by the regulator of its 'teeth'.
23/92	The Chair further noted that a UUK report had been released on the value of HE to the UK economy (£115bn, including 382,000 jobs) and the CUC was asking governors to promote it.
23/93	The Chair finally noted the upcoming graduation on 5 December at the Barbican and encouraged all governors to attend, including the governors' dinner the night before.
23/94	In discussion, the Board noted the much more positive tone to higher education from Labour's frontbench, although it was noted the change in tone was unlikely to be supported with further funding.
	VC REPORT
23/95	<p>The Vice-Chancellor introduced his report, which saw several very positive key developments since the last meeting. In particular, the Vice-Chancellor informed the Board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the University had improved its overall NSS positivity scores significantly year on year to 72.6% and had also received an extremely positive PTES outcome at 86% satisfaction, including coming second out of 101 universities for teaching. It was recognized that whilst this was the right direction of travel, there was still work to be done to be even better and in particular to improve positivity on the larger courses of DFP and EPP. the University had received a Silver TEF rating. This was a huge achievement for the University and the Vice-Chancellor thanked everyone involved in delivering such positive student outcomes and particularly the Dean and Deputy Vice-Chancellor who had lifted the academic community. student recruitment looked strong, with a broadly at budget position. There were some concerns around recruitment to the traditional portfolio being flat, or down in some areas, but this appeared to be a picture across the sector. However, losses were offset by gains in recruitment to business and computing courses. It was reported that continuation to level 5 was slightly down on expectations, but movement from level 5 into level 6 was slightly up on predictions. The Vice-Chancellor assured there

	<p>was a focus on level 4 progression in the coming year to ensure this rose again next year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of the positive news regarding franchise provision, with two new proposed franchise partners being brought for approval.
23/96	It was noted that some governors had benefited from a tour of the R3 building before the Board meeting. The Vice-Chancellor updated the Board that negotiations were going well, and a lease was expected to be signed shortly.
23/97	Finally, the Vice-Chancellor reported a decision, in conjunction with the IT Director, to retain a managed cyber security service. REDACTED
23/98	<p>In discussion the following points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that whilst the student numbers looked positive, the first SLC census date in late November was the first real test; although a first report would be run at the 2-week post enrolment point. • International students had been impacted in their ability to travel by delays to the visa premium service in India, which meant some students were still awaiting travel documentation. • This year there would be an additional November intake, which was not in the budget, and so any shortfall across domestic or international recruitment in September could be off-set then.
23/99	The Chief Operating Officer gave the Board further information regarding student recruitment, in particular noting that year on year undergraduate enrolments were expected to be 3% down, which was in line with the sector: UCAS showing enrolments down 2.4% overall. For Ravensbourne, however, the decline was not evenly spread with the core portfolio being down by 18%; but the new portfolio (business and computing) up 112%. It was noted a similar pattern had been seen during clearing; with overall clearing applications up 15% (following the upward national trend), again with the core portfolio down (9%), but business and computing significantly up (60%). The Board was assured that the decline in applications to creative courses was a sector-wide issue, not a Ravensbourne issue, with 70,000 fewer applications in the sector.
23/100	In relation to postgraduate numbers, it was noted the increase was circa 500% on last year, almost all of which came from business and computing, dominantly from international students.
23/101	<p>In discussion, the Board noted that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Architecture had seen particular problems, with students seemingly unwilling to commit to a 7-year training journey. • The large increase in postgraduate students was from planned, strategic growth, which had been a catalyst to securing the new R3 building. • to support student number growth in semester 1, classes would now be scheduled into the early evening. • The Kit Store was not a key resource for the growth areas, but additional recruitment had taken place for academic and student support staff. • A 5-year forecast would come to the Finance Committee and Board in November on the basis of firmer student numbers for 23/24.
23/102	The Vice-Chancellor introduced the OBC Audit Report REDACTED
23/103	REDACTED
23/104	REDACTED
23/105	The Board thanked the University Secretary for his work on the audit and noted the Vice-Chancellor's report.

RAVENSBOURNE STUDENT UNION	
23/106	The Students' Union Manager joined the meeting.
23/107	<p>The Acting Students' Union President and Students' Union Manager introduced the purpose of the SU and reiterated the four strategic pillars, including: rebuilding student communities, empowering student voices, support for sabbatical officers and restructuring the SU for a sustainable future. They outlined key successes over the year, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing clubs and societies from 5 to 29; • Hosting a number of events for international student communities; • debating twelve motions in the SU Parliament; • a successful sabbatical election process; • the roll out of the STAAR academy • hosting the first ever student led staff awards; • undertaking internal and external training (e.g. NUS); • engaging 1200 students across various events in the last year; and • increasing positivity regarding the union by 13.69%.
23/108	The team acknowledged there remained areas for improvement, including response turnaround times to student queries and better timing of events.
23/109	Over the next year the SU was seeking to further increase clubs and societies to 40; hold even more extra-curricular activities (at least two per month); and launch new welfare initiatives for students, particularly at high stress periods. The team outlined further resources which could support the SU in achieving these goals.
23/110	The Chair thanked the Acting President and SU Manager for their presentation and praised the four pillars. It was noted that resourcing matters should be taken up directly with the executive or RSU Advisory Board.
23/111	<p>In discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the importance of aligning the work on brand, culture and values across the University and SU was emphasized, with the team acknowledging those conversations had already been started; • the SU team were thanked for all their hard work in the Student TEF Submission, which had demonstrably impacted the overall result; and • the work that was being done to embed the student voice into the committee structures was noted.
23/112	The Students' Union Manager left the meeting.
FRANCHISE BUSINESS CASES	
23/113	The Head of Strategic Recruitment Partnerships joined the meeting.
23/114	The Vice-Chancellor introduced the proposal to approve two new franchise partners: Fairfield School of Business and REDACTED. The Board was informed that the University had been approached by several organisations, but was only bringing forward the two best propositions, which the executive felt were of high quality and had good potential to recruit reasonable student numbers. The Vice-Chancellor reiterated the partnership strategy, which was to have a small number of high-quality partners. REDACTED Finally, the Vice-Chancellor outlined the extensive discussions and visits which had taken place over the last few months to get the business cases ready.
23/115	The Head of Strategic Recruitment Partnerships outlined the papers for the Board. In particular it was noted that both organisations were private family-run providers of higher education. Both were part of established groups of companies providing higher education,

<p>23/116</p>	<p>REDACTED. The organisations operated from multiple locations, including in London and Manchester and had strong growth ambitions. It was noted that Fairfield had OfS registration and numerous other successful partnerships.</p> <p>The Board was informed that both organisations had been subject to extensive academic, legal and financial due diligence, with some aspects still outstanding. Significant risk areas had been identified and considered, but to date there were no barriers identified with both partners appearing credible and high quality. It was noted that both partners eventually wanted to deliver creative courses, but they were currently on a journey to that, which the University would support them with over the coming years.</p>
<p>23/117</p>	<p>REDACTED</p>
<p>23/118</p>	<p>The Chair informed the Board he had met the proposed partners, including the senior managers and owners. It was noted they appeared impressive and entrepreneurial but also driven by educational outcomes. REDACTED.</p>
<p>23/119</p>	<p>In discussion, the following points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the audit committee had considered a new risk dedicated to partnerships which gave confidence in how the executive was approaching franchise provision; • the geographical expansion of the Ravensbourne brand was welcomed, but the brand impact needed monitoring; • that the student numbers proposed were dominantly in business areas, which posed a question as to the core values of Ravensbourne; • that there was a need to manage the student numbers to ensure Ravensbourne's infrastructure could support it; and • that the University would not keep the partners at arm's length, but try and build a true partnerships.
<p>23/120</p>	<p>The Board considered more generally the impact of the proposal on Ravensbourne, particularly the balance of students on courses in business v creative; and the number of students taught through franchise provision v directly by the University. It was noted the University had moved forward on several significant initiatives and there was now a need to reflect, fill in the gaps and decide how to move forward in a strategic way.</p>
<p>23/121</p>	<p>Finally, the Board noted the exciting opportunity to be able to change the organisation's direction, but that this must be undertaken in a managed way.</p>
<p>23/122</p>	<p>The Board approved the business cases, but on the proviso the projected numbers were not committed to in the contract. It was noted that the contract needed Board approval, and the Board agreed to delegate approval to a sub-set of the Chair of the Board, Chairs of Committees and Kate Gregory.</p>
<p>23/123</p>	<p>The Head of Strategic Recruitment Partnerships left the meeting.</p>
	<p>KPIs</p>
<p>23/124</p>	<p>The Chair introduced the suite of KPIs which had been drafted to accompany the University strategy to 2026. It was noted that some had already been reached and so they would be updated to reflect a realistic 23-24 ambition. The Chair informed the Board that over the next twelve months, it was hoped the strategy itself would be revisited and this would then spear further work to reconsider the appropriate measures to adopt.</p>
<p>23/125</p>	<p>Due to time, it was agreed to put KPIs on the agenda for the next meeting to enable a fuller discussion.</p>

	TEF AND NSS
23/126	The Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Dean presented the papers on the TEF and NSS.
23/127	In relation to the TEF, they noted the University had been awarded a Silver overall with a Silver in student outcomes and a Bronze in student experience. Overall, the University was able to demonstrate the impact of Covid on the student experience, which supported the overall Silver despite the outcome of Bronze for student experience. It was noted that the impact of Covid and post-Covid changes had been supported by the student submission, for which thanks were extended to the Students' Union.
23/128	In relation to student satisfaction, the Board was informed of the PTES outcomes in which the University had come 29th overall and second for teaching out of 101 universities. It was noted that resources remained a challenging area, in which the library had featured heavily. Overall, the survey had elicited a 25% response rate, which was high in relation to the sector, and had been dominantly completed by the new international students and so represented a positive first impression of their university experience.
23/129	In relation to the NSS, a significant upward lift in improvement was noted, with some areas seeing an almost 10% improvement. Overall positivity now stood at 72.6% (an internally calculated metric), which was some 7.2% ahead of the prior year. Although this had moved in the right direction, it was accepted it was still not yet where it needed to be, and the University remained committed to improving this further. It was particularly noted that some areas had seen particularly good gains (e.g. DFP had improved by over 10%), although this was sometimes from a low base. Finally, the Board was informed that the distance between the Ravensbourne positivity score and the top scorer in the University's competitor set had now halved, which was celebrated as a significant achievement.
23/130	In discussion, the following points were made: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that the student submission had been critical to the overall Silver; • that the Bronze in student experience showed there was still work to be done and that it was important to get this right; • that many of the competitor set were multi-faculty and it was widely seen that creative students were more critical than others; and when looking at other arts institutions in the competitor set, the gap in positivity was extremely narrow; • that positivity to the student voice had seen low improvement and was still low. The Board noted the efforts which had been taken in this space, including CoGen groups and the academic engagement of students; and • that the graduating students had still been heavily impacted by Covid and the current Level 5 students would hopefully be significantly more positive in due course.
23/131	The Board noted the report.
	COMMITTEE SUMMARY
23/132	The Board noted the summary of the audit committee from 5 September 2023.
	ANY OTHER BUSINESS
23/133	No other business was declared.
	DATE OF NEXT MEETING
23/134	Wednesday 15 November 2023 4:00PM – 7:00PM at City Hall.