

# BOARD OF GOVERNORS

## Minutes

### Of the Board of Governors meeting held on Tuesday, 11 October 2022 in the Directorate Boardroom, St Mary’s Road, Ealing

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| **Present:** | Ms Jennifer Bernard (Independent Governor, Chair of the Board of Governors)  Mr Wladimir Albuja (Student Representative)  Ms Kim Ansell (Independent Governor)  Ms Aprileen Alexander (Independent Governor)  Ms Shirley Cameron (Independent Governor)  Ms Tina Coates (Independent Governor)  Mr Derek Hicks (Independent Governor)  Mr James Edmunds (Academic Board Representative)  Mr Steve Fowler (Independent Governor)  Professor Peter John (Vice-Chancellor)  Ms Maisie Kelly (SU President)  Mr Jonathan Lawrence (Independent Governor)  Professor Heather Loveday (Professoriate Representative)  Dr Christopher McLaverty (Independent Governor)  Ms Andrea Miller (Independent Governor)  Ms Kerry O’Callaghan (Independent Governor)  Ms Helena Peacock (Independent Governor)  Mr Kiran Virdee (Independent Governor)  Mr Stuart Wright (Independent Governor) |
| **In attendance:** | Mr Adrian Ellison (Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor and Chief Information Officer)  Mr Patrick Fuller (Chief Financial Officer)  Dr Suresh Gamlath Pro Vice-Chancellor, Business Development)  Mr Neil Henderson (Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development)  Ms Coral Mason (Assistant Clerk to the Board)  Ms Sara Raybould (Pro Vice-Chancellor, Student Experience)  Ms Lynn Robinson (Interim University Secretary)  Dr Kostas Tzortzis (Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor and Director of Strategic Planning)  Ms Claire Willitts (Director of Property Services) |
| **Apologies:** | Ms Sandra Botterell (Independent Governor)  Dr Paul Sahota (Independent Governor)  Professor Anthony Woodman (Deputy Vice-Chancellor) |

1. **Apologies for absence, announcements and declarations of interest**
   1. There were no declarations of interest.
   2. Apologies were recorded above.

**Introduction by the Chair**

* 1. The Chair of the Board opened the meeting welcoming the new members to the Board of Governors.
  2. Members reflected on UWL’s journey since the publication of the last strategic plan, Achievement 2023, and the transition to the new plan, Impact 2028. The targets and objectives in Achievement 2023 had provided the means to measure success and the facility to move from one strategic plan to the next.
  3. Amongst others, external measures of success were reflected in the league tables, the growing reputation of the University and the increase in student numbers particularly the increase in international students over the last recruitment drive.

1. **Update on Achievement 2023: Academic year 2021-22 (Presentation)**
   1. The Vice-Chancellor opened the presentation by acknowledging the support of the Board of Governors and the cooperative work with the Students’ Union.
   2. The presentation covered the journey through 2021-22 and how this would provide a platform for the transition into 2022-23 and the new strategic plan, Impact 2028.
   3. The Vice-Chancellor provided an overview of the sector risks which included current government instability that had led to fluctuating economic problems. The Vice-Chancellor noted that planning was critical but, as with all plans, there was also an element of luck. An example of this was the installation of the ground source heat pump as part of the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) which meant the University would not be significantly adversely affected by an increase in utility bills.

* 1. The OfS introduction of the B3 conditions would be a challenge for the University as the data would not be contextualised. As the TEF outcome would now be dependent on the data used for B3, it would be increasingly difficult for many HEIs to achieve gold status.
  2. The government mini-budget announcements had led to a crisis with pension funds which may have an impact on the sector in addition to the current USS problems which will undermine many HEIs cash reserves and surplus.
  3. The sector also faced negative public perception as it moved to a ‘new normal’ after the pandemic with many HEIs not returning to face-to-face teaching.
  4. All of the above were in addition to a crisis in young people’s mental health, Brexit and changes to entry level qualifications.
  5. The Vice-Chancellor moved to progress on Achievement 2023 and reaffirmed the mission, vision, values and strategic objectives.
  6. The University’s financial position had exceeded budget estimates with income at £170m, a 9% surplus and £80m in cash reserves. This position was after the purchase of Ruskin College, Oxford and Century and Cavendish House. With the purchase of Century and Cavendish House the University no longer rented Villiers House which provided a saving on rent and costs related to the upgrade of Villiers House. The Director of Property Services confirmed the modifications to Century and Cavendish House had been approved by Ealing Council and included eight new classrooms, with three more to be developed, a crime suite and a drama suite. The Marcia Worrell Research Hub would be housed in the buildings along with the new School of Medicine. Over 200 administrative staff had been relocated to the buildings which allowed further space in Paragon House and St Mary’s Road to be turned over to teaching space.
  7. The Vice-Chancellor informed members that achieving the targets as set out in the OfS B3 conditions would be a difficult task because the University recruited students at level three providing them the opportunity to study at foundation level with direct entry to the first year of a degree, subject to them passing the foundation level. A Proportion of level three students did not complete the course, often not due to academic failure but due to life circumstances, which impacted on the whole of the University’s completion and continuation rates.
  8. The University maintained good degree outcomes and its staff/student ratio was in the upper sector quartile. The University continued to work on improving its BAME outcomes.
  9. Recruitment increased steadily year on year with an overall student population of approximately 14,000. Apprenticeship recruitment had exceeded the target of 800 with 846 students recruited.
  10. The end of year results for Ruskin College showed a very small surplus as opposed to a deficit of £2m which the University had inherited.
  11. Enterprise activity generated an income of £69m with a 22% margin and work continued with partnership activity to further grow income. Income from enterprise activity was used to support the student experience.
  12. The School of Biomedical Sciences had been open for three years with over 120 students recruited. The School was the prelude to the establishment of a School of Medicine which was in the planning stages.
  13. Drama Studio London (DSL) had recruited well and there had been a number of renovations to the DSL estate.
  14. The Institute for Policing had recruited over 1572 students to date, and it was anticipated recruitment would continue to grow.
  15. The Internal Auditors, KPMG, had yet to provide an audit opinion but it was likely the University would receive a full assurance outcome.
  16. The University had been awarded the Sunday Times Good University Guide University of the Year for teaching quality and University of the year for the student experience, the first time a HEI had received both awards. Property Services and Library Services have been shortlisted for a Times Higher award and the Claude Littner Business School ‘Fresh Minds’ initiative have been nominated for an AimHigher award.
  17. Westmont Hub continued to expand with an additional 36 new companies and 956 members.
  18. The APVC and Chief Information Officer confirmed SITS was now operational in Registry, for student admissions, and had been implemented on time and on budget.
  19. The University had appointed a new Academic Registrar, Mr Joshua Hemmings, formerly Director of Academic Quality and Standards.
  20. The excellent REF result had placed UWL within the top 100 research institutions and confirmed the synergy between teaching and research.
  21. The Centre for Inequality and Levelling Up (CEILUP) and the National Educational Opportunities Network (NEON) were fully operational within the University with the Director recently being appointed a Parliamentary Fellow.
  22. The Geller Institute of Aging and Memory (GIAM) had been awarded a £1m research grant from the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR).
  23. Foundation students were at the heart of the UWL ethos by providing opportunity, but foundation study carried risks around continuation and completion and consideration would be given to the establishment of a parallel institution for foundation level students. A foundation academy may be able to address the risks related to the B3 conditions, but continuation remained a sector wide problem. Civitas continued to identify and support students who were at risk of leaving but in most of the cases their reason for leaving were not related to their studies. The SU President, as a foundation year student, confirmed foundation level students need to feel a part of the University and a separate academy may not provide a university experience for foundation level students.
  24. The appointment of a Director of Research was in progress.
  25. The University had signed an agreement with Perlego which allows all UWL students, regardless of where they were studying in the world, access to over a million ebooks. Partner institutions would have access to the facility. The Senior Pro Vice-Chancellor confirmed the curriculum would be reviewed to maximise the Perlego offering and highlighted the current arrangement with John Smith Bookshop. Members noted that downloads could be monitored at individual level and would be used as another tool to measure engagement. Due diligence had been carried out against potential cyberattacks and the APVC and Chief Information Officer confirmed satisfaction with safeguards in place.
  26. The University rankings in all the league tables had improved in 2021-22 noting some remarkable successes: 13th best for social inclusion, 8th best university in London, and ranked 23rd and best modern university in the country in the Guardian University Guide.
  27. The Vice-Chancellor summarised the progress noting that most of the KPIs in Achievement 2023 had been met or were on target to be achieved.
  28. Members noted the current government’s negative views on international students, but members agreed that they provided value-added for home students by increasing the institution’s global outlook, and the income they generated enhanced the student experience for all students.
  29. The University has taken a number of managed risks, particularly around its estate, that have paid off. Risks could only be taken when finances were strong and the University has used its surplus to enhance the student experience through enhancing the estate, upgrading the student records system and providing additional resources to support students.
  30. The Board of Governors **NOTED** the presentation.

1. **Reflection on the year and implications for the future strategic plan (Discussion groups)**
   1. Members broke down into groups with feedback to be given at a later point in the day.
2. **Sustainability Strategy (Presentation)**

4.1      The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Business Development) opened the presentation with an overview of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that the University has formally adopted.  The SDGs were written by the United Nations to be applied at a national level, therefore it is necessary for the University to use a framework that was suited for the Higher Education Sector.

4.2      The University has adopted the Times Higher Impact Rankings that assess universities against the SDGs. Accordingly the University will assess its performance across all SDGs and will submit to SDG-17 plus three other SDGs where it can evidence the best impact.

4.3      The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Business Development) proposed Sustainability action plan based on three strategic tiers that would focus on maximising the University’s impact. The University will set specific targets to improve on SDG-17 Partnership for the Goals, 3 Good Health and Well Being, 7 Affordable and Clean Energy, and 10 Reduced Inequalities. It will seek continuous improvement on Goals 2, 4, 8, 12, 13; while monitoring ongoing progress across the other SDGs.

4.4      A Sustainability Management Board had been established to develop the University’s strategy and action plan in respect of the UN Sustainability Goals and would continuously monitor progress through performance indicators.

4.5     The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Business Development) informed members that the University is making good progress in environmental management on campus, making great strides towards decarbonisation, and with the revised sustainability plan make significant progress in attaining the UN SDGs.

4.6      The Board of Governors **APPROVED**the revised sustainability plan and **NOTED**the presentation

1. **Impact 2028 – The story so far (Presentation)**

5.1 The Vice-Chancellor provided an overview of the leadership of the University, the working relationships that allowed the leadership model to work and how it would shape the future of the University. This included the development of staff, financial responsibility, a strong community and clear management of the organisation.

5.2 Impact 2028 would be developed during 2022-23 through discussions with staff, stakeholders, regional connections, global partners, business and alumni, and the Students’ Union.

5.3 The proposed mission and statement for Impact 2028 were:

**Mission:** To nurture talent in all its forms, and empower our graduates to be confident, healthy, leading career professionals.

**Vision:** to be a model institution in the preparation of graduates who are economically, socially and ecologically impactful. A university that challenges, inspires, transforms and achieves – a genuine meritocracy.

5.4 The University would be an activist institution which would provide opportunities, would enable staff and students, would be inspirational and inclusive, productive and would be a servant to all staff and students.

5.5 The Vice-Chancellor set out the super targets noting that some of them had already been achieved but the focus would be to maintain and progress these targets. The super targets included being ranked within the top 70 research institutions which would lead to a 500-world ranking and extend the global reach; be in the top 10 for inclusion; open a School of Medicine; and be a platinum institution for sustainability and climate action. The University would be impactful on the community, staff, students, the economy, society and the environment.

5.6 The strategic aims within Impact 2028 would be to diversify the portfolio moving towards STEM pathways, to be a leading university for sustainability, the levelling up university by offering greater opportunities, to be an ‘anchor’ institution for West London, and extend the digital portfolio.

5.7 Members were informed that the University had been working towards being an ‘anchor’ within the locality, but the local colleges had not always been keen to engage. Work would continue to try and engage all local FE Colleges in the hope that there would be a shared vision for the future.

* 1. The Board of Governors **NOTED** the presentation and gave initial comments and feedback.

1. **Feedback session from earlier group discussions (Discussion)**

6.1 The APVC and Chief Information Officer provided a summary of the discussion from the first group highlighting the fact that the University was branded the ‘Career University’, and everything should evolve from the brand. Questions focused around whether the University should aim to grow further or continue to do what it current did but aim to make it even better? Members agreed that students had wrap around care and that was why students performed so well. The student experience had to be at the core of all initiatives, but staff should remain mindful of possible changes in the student demographics.

* 1. Should the University cut areas that were not performing well, or should it remain broad? The University had shown it could be flexible and could make changes quickly, but its portfolio should remain broad and STEM subjects should be blended with arts and humanities. By remaining broad the University could capitalise on changes in the external environment, particularly changing government initiatives.
  2. Members noted creative subjects were being withdrawn from post-92 institutions as graduates found it difficult to find employment. Whilst the University should remain broad there had to be a level of practicality in the portfolio and it may be that some subjects would have to be withdrawn. Members advised close monitoring of the portfolio as the changes could shift the culture of the institution.
  3. ‘Backing winners’ did not always guarantee a successful outcome in the sector. No one could predict the future, and no one could predict what successive governments would do so the University had to forge its own path.
  4. The Senior Pro Vice-Chancellor’s (Student Experience) group agreed that the University needed to hold onto what it did well which was to enable people to have a professional life and to keep a wide range of paths open for students to succeed. Students were provided with the tools to ensure they were prepared for the jobs for the future. The University needed to remain flexible, open to new ideas and remain agile.
  5. The University had a strong sense of community, and this could be lost if it grew too big. The University ignited an emotional feeling in staff and students.
  6. The University was not a part of the Russell Group, and it should not want to be because it provided a unique offering.
  7. Members agreed: student first, measures second, regulator third.
  8. The University was a catalyst institution and provided a vehicle for change for students.
  9. The Vice-Chancellor’s group confirmed success was about transforming lives and providing opportunities.
  10. The Student Union’s Big Conversation allowed individuals to feel like their voice mattered and that ethos was carried through a student’s time at UWL.
  11. Members queried how success was measured? Was this through the impact on the sector noting a number of HEIs had approached UWL to seek information on its processes.
  12. Members agreed that growth was a good thing but should be undertaken at a slow, incremental pace as fast growth could alter what made UWL unique.
  13. The Chief Financial Officers’ group agreed that there should be no deviation from the mission and statement set out in Achievement 2023.
  14. Success should mean growing student numbers at a measured pace, increase course offerings and ensure that the student experience was at the centre of all University plans.
  15. Members queried how visible UWL was and how visible it should be. Should the brand be stronger? If so, who was the target audience? Was the institution a local or national University?
  16. The University was successful in many areas, but the brand did not appear to be cohesive as it looked like a host of separate identities so how could the brand be more visible?
  17. Members agreed financial success provided opportunities.
  18. Members queried whether UWL had a point of view on subjects and was that point of view clearly articulated?
  19. The Board of Governors **NOTED** the discussions

**7. Closing comments from the Chair of the Board and the Vice-Chancellor**

7.1 The Vice-Chancellor confirmed the discussions above would be placed in context within Impact 2028 and a discussion with stakeholders would take place.

7.2 The first draft of Impact 2028 would be available at the Board of Governors away day on 30-31 January 2023 allowing members to make further comment. The final version would be ready by April 2023 and would be online soon after.

7.3 Members agreed there should be a smaller number of KPIs which would allow greater detail in measuring progress. Members requested process indicators be available and updated yearly which would allow flexibility and a clearer vision on progress.

7.4 Members agreed the direction of travel remained positive, but a review of the portfolio would be critical.

7.5 The Chair of the Board confirmed members could feed through any additional comments to the Vice-Chancellor.

7.6 The Chair of the Board thanked members and closed the meeting.

**8. Date of next meeting**

8.1 The next meeting of the Board of Governors would take place on Tuesday, 22 November 2022 in the Directorate Boardroom, St Mary’s Road, Ealing

**Signed by Ms Jennifer Bernard** Date

**Chair of the Board of Governors**

**Author:** Lynn Robinson

**Title:** Interim University Secretary

**Date:** October 2022