

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Minutes

Of the Board of Governors meeting held on Tuesday, 10 October 2023 at Ruskin College, Oxford

Present:

Mr Derek Hicks (Chair of the Board of Governors)
Ms Kim Ansell (Independent Governor)
Ms Aprileen Alexander (Independent Governor)
Ms Sandra Botterell (Independent Governor)
Ms Shirley Cameron (Independent Governor)
Mr James Edmunds (Academic Board Representative)
Mr Steve Fowler (Independent Governor)
Ms Alison Griffin (Staff Governor)
Professor Peter John CBE (Vice-Chancellor)
Ms Maisie Kelly (SU President)
Mr Jonathan Lawrence (Independent Governor)
Ms Kerry O'Callaghan (Independent Governor)
Ms Helena Peacock (Independent Governor)
Mr Stuart Wright (Independent Governor)

In attendance:

Mr Patrick Fuller (Group Chief Financial Officer)
Dr Suresh Gamlath (Pro Vice-Chancellor, Business Development)
Mr Joshua Heming (University Secretary)
Mr Neil Henderson (Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development)
Ms Tracy McAuliffe (APVC Student Affairs) (for agenda item 6)
Ms Coral Mason (Assistant Clerk to the Board)
Ms Sara Raybould (Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Student Experience)
Dr Kostas Tzortzis (Pro Vice-Chancellor (Strategy, Performance and Analytics))
Ms Claire Willitts (Director of Property Services)
Professor Anthony Woodman (Provost and Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor)

Apologies:

Ms Tina Coates (Independent Governor)
Mr Adrian Ellison (Associate PVC and Chief Information Officer)
Professor Heather Loveday (Professoriate Representative)
Dr Christopher McLaverty (Independent Governor)
Ms Andrea Miller (Independent Governor)
Mr Kiran Virdee (Independent Governor)

1 Apologies for absence, announcements and declarations of interest

1.1 There were no declarations of interest.

1.2 Apologies were recorded above.

Introduction by the Chair

1.3 The Chair of the Board opened the meeting welcoming members to Ruskin College and outlined the proceedings for the day with the initial discussion on the new strategic plan, *Impact 2028*, feeding through to all of the items on the agenda.

2 Review of the year (Presentation)

2.1 The Vice-Chancellor opened the presentation by looking at the current sector risks. UWL was now a member of University Alliance (UA) and was able to make sector comparisons when considering how sector risks were being addressed. Collectively, the Vice-Chancellor considered UWL to be an outlier, even in UA, because it had managed its resources effectively and had a level of resilience that many did not share. When reviewing the rankings within University Alliance, UWL consistently performed above average and often was a leader.

2.2 Regulatory challenges persisted and it was likely, if a Labour government were to be elected, they would make few changes in terms of regulations and funding.

2.3 The sector was facing a student mental health epidemic compounded by a national cost of living crisis and it was difficult to navigate the most effective route to support students and staff.

2.4 Brexit continued to impact the sector but the news that the UK would be re-joining Horizon 2020 was welcome.

2.5 Concerns persisted around the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the different ways students were learning. The sector would need to adapt to new teaching methods and embrace digital changes.

2.6 Sustainability remained high on student agendas with evidence suggesting it was factored into their decisions when applying for a university place. Sustainability was also a core priority for UWL and was embedded into all policy decisions.

2.7 The Vice-Chancellor confirmed the mission, vision and values in *Impact 2028*, remained largely unchanged from *Achievement 2023*:

Mission: to nurture talent in all its forms, regardless of social background, gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity; and to 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.

- 2.8 The new strategic objectives built on the objectives in *Achievement 2023* and members agreed that it was often difficult to maintain the position already achieved. Whilst the University had remained in the top 50 universities in the UK in the most recent rankings, work was ongoing to ensure it remained there along with ensuring UWL remained in the top 20 for social inclusion. The Vice-Chancellor reminded members that UWL had recently been named the University of the Year for Social Inclusion by the Daily Mail. Members noted UWL's positions in the league tables, subject rankings in the Guardian University Guide and the UWL's sector positions in The Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide.
- 2.9 The University would be formulating a student accommodation strategy to ensure students had access to safe, affordable accommodation.
- 2.10 The implementation of the new student records system remained on time, on budget and fully operational with access to both staff and students. The Vice-Chancellor informed members that the company, Tribal SITS, had been sold but work would continue to ensure the installation of SITS remained on schedule.
- 2.11 The recent National Student Survey (NSS) results had been encouraging even though there had been a number of changes to the questions. UWL's average score was 86%.
- 2.12 **Some references in this section have been redacted.**
- 2.13 **Some references in this section have been redacted.**
- 2.14 Reflecting on progress against the previous strategic plan, *Achievement 2023*, the UWL group unaudited accounts for 2022-23 were £205m with £18m surplus (9%) and cash reserves of £89m.
- 2.15 The Vice-Chancellor highlighted the importance of a firm financial platform. Success in the sector depended on a strong financial management of staff costs and centralising finances, something many HEIs had failed to do. Members were reminded of the staff student ratio of 1:12 which was one of the best in the sector.
- 2.16 The University was awarded a silver in the recent Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). The results had been broken down into two components with UWL receiving a gold for student experience and bronze for student outcomes. It was noted that whilst completion and continuation was improving, it remained a cause for concern.
- 2.17 Student recruitment remained buoyant with an exceptional year for overseas recruitment across the sector. UWL recruited 680 undergraduate and 890 postgraduate overseas students with the total number of students recruited for 2023-24 being 4500. Members were informed that the success in the league tables played a big part in overseas student recruitment.
- 2.18 Recruitment at Ruskin College continued to be positive with strong further education and higher education intakes. Law at undergraduate level had proven to be particularly popular. Further scoping to extend higher education provision was in progress.

- 2.19 Enterprise income had exceeded £100m with a 24% margin.
- 2.20 Partnership activity continued to grow by expanding course portfolios with current partners and establishing new partners. The University was now the sole partner with Marbella International University Centre (MIUC) which provided UWL with a share of the profits.
- 2.21 The Provost and Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor continued to progress work on the School of Medicine with curriculums now being approved. It was anticipated the launch of the first stage would take place in November 2023.
- 2.22 Drama Studio London now had over 190 students and recruitment remained positive.
- 2.23 The Institute for Policing Studies had faced a number of recruitment concerns due to the negative publicity relating to the London Metropolitan Police. In addition, the new Commissioner of the Met, Sir Mark Rowley, was not convinced about the current graduate training plan. The University was in negotiations with the London Policing College about the possibility of buying out the business.
- 2.24 Work at Century and Cavendish House was complete and both buildings were fully operational.
- 2.25 A Director of Research had been appointed. Research income had grown to £3m which was small but was growing incrementally.
- 2.26 Professor Graeme Atherton had had his Parliamentary Fellowship extended. Under the leadership of Professor Atherton the Centre for Inequality and Levelling Up (CEILUP) continued to raise its national profile. **Some references in this section have been redacted.**
- 2.27 Members reviewed the *Achievement 2023* KPIs noting most of them had been achieved. Graduate employability was 76% against a KPI of 80% And the completion KPI was 76% against a KPI of 80%; work to improve graduate employability and completion was ongoing.. The TEF KPI was silver against a KPI of gold but the changes to the exercise had made attaining gold increasingly difficult and it was reaffirmed that UWL had achieved gold in the sub category of student experience. The Alumni and Development KPI was £12m against a KPI of £15m but the Head of Alumni and Development would be preparing a new strategic focus to address this.
- 2.28 The Vice-Chancellor confirmed the University remained competitive in a very uncertain sector.
- 2.29 Members queried what would happen if the University failed to meet the B3 conditions. The PVC Strategy, Performance and Analytics informed members that there could be financial implications and it was a condition of OfS registration. Overall UWL was at or just above the thresholds but there were a number of courses at UWL that fell below the thresholds. As a widening participation institution, UWL recruited many students from challenging backgrounds and worked

hard to support them to succeed. However, this meant it was sometimes difficult to meet all of the B3 benchmarks.

- 2.30 Members commented on the reduction in staff costs and queried whether this was a positive achievement as staffing levels, both academic and professional services, affect the student experience. Members agreed that the staff metric should be reconsidered to reflect the absolute figure in relation to income level.

Action: Vice-Chancellor

- 2.31 The Board of Governors **NOTED** the presentation.

3. Impact 2028 (Presentation)

- 3.1 The Vice-Chancellor informed members that previous comments on the strategic plan had been included in the current version but further changes arising from the meeting would be included.

- 3.2 Members agreed the mission, vision and values remained current and relevant. The strategic pillars had been reduced to five from the previous version and were more focused. The strategic priorities were clearly set out and the strategic goals were now prioritised. The four main priorities were:

- Promoting student success and lifelong learning
- Building scalable, impactful research
- Re-balancing the curriculum from SHAPE to STEM, and
- Embedding sustainability throughout the curriculum.

The remaining strategic goals were:

- Creating a high performing staff culture,
- Maintaining a strong, sustainable financial base,
- Generating local, national and global partnerships,
- Developing enterprise activities and innovative entrepreneurs, and
- Deploying and integrating AI and other digital technologies.

- 3.3 The Vice-Chancellor referred members to the KPIs on the final page and asked members to reflect on whether they reflected the strategic goals and whether the targets were appropriate.

- 3.4 The Board of Governors **CONSIDERED** the strategic plan.

4. Discussion on implementation of *Impact 2028* (Discussions)

- 4.1 Members were invited to break out into small groups to discuss *Impact 2028*.

5. Feedback from discussions

- 5.1 The Chair of the Board asked each group to feedback on their discussions.

- 5.2 The groups would have liked to see more on social values and inclusion in the plan.

- 5.3 There should be greater emphasis on the priority strategic goals with the remaining ones being enablers that supported the priorities. They should also link to business and employer opportunities for students which would help with graduate recruitment. Consideration should be given to renaming the strategic goals challenges and opportunities. There was debate about the role of the strategic pillars and their connection to the strategic values.
- 5.4 There should be a clear route between the values and commitments and the objectives. The plan clearly articulated aspirations but was less clear on how they would be realised.
- 5.5 It was recommended that the plan should not include references to Brexit.
- 5.6 One of the strategic goals was: creating a high performing staff culture, and one group noted there was no further reference to staff throughout the document and further mapping should be undertaken.
- 5.7 Reference to enhancing degree classifications should reference reducing attainment gaps.
- 5.8 One group focused on the KPIs and queried whether they were all equal. As with the strategic goals, the KPIs should be divided into the priority and feeder KPIs. The top five KPIs should be:
- National Student Survey (NSS)
 - Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)
 - Research Excellence Framework (REF)
 - Sustainability
 - Financial (encompassing the current financial KPIs into one)

If the priority KPIs were realised then the remaining KPI targets would materialise.

- 5.9 The University should now focus on what was achievable and continue to build on successes to achieve the targets set out in the KPIs.
- 5.10 One group queried how VCE would know whether they were on track with the strategic goals and felt the KPIs focused on management capacity rather than resources. The Vice-Chancellor informed members that the plan was flexible, and the priorities could be reconfigured to reflect changing circumstances in the sector. Members were further assured that the Board would review the plan on a regular basis.
- 5.11 Concern was raised about the branding as it did not seem to reflect the prevailing UWL branding. The Vice-Chancellor informed members that the cover showed the University's crest but would meet with the Marketing team to view alternative options.
- 5.12 Members requested a glossary of acronyms be provided.
- Action: Vice-Chancellor**
- 5.13 **Some references in this section have been redacted.**

5.14 Overall, members agreed it was a positive document that provided a strong corporate image of the UWL Group and set out a path for the next five years.

5.15 The Board of Governors **NOTED** the feedback

6. Safeguarding (Presentation)

6.1 The APVC Student Affairs reminded members that Ofsted had visited Ruskin College in October 2022 and raised concerns around safeguarding.

6.2 The presentation was to inform Governors of the document from the Department of Education – Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) which would be applicable to the whole UWL Group. Although the document references children in the title it is applicable to all vulnerable adults. UWL documents on safeguarding would be updated and would be considered at a Board meeting later in the academic year along with the Cause for Concern Policy which provided greater context.

Action: APVC Student Affairs

6.3 There would be one set of policies for Ruskin College and another set for the remaining UWL Group.

6.4 The Policy on Harassment and Sexual Misconduct would also be reviewed when guidance from the OfS was published and would be considered by the Board.

Action: University Secretary

6.5 Members would receive the slides and were requested to review and note Appendix A which provided a condensed version of the changes.

Action: University Secretary

6.6 Members queried the guidance on undertaking a search on social media of potential employees. Members agreed this would be more relevant when employees are in contact with children. Currently, UWL does not undertake a social media search but if the policy changed then consideration would be given on how far back a social media search should be. Any change in policy would be applicable for Governors and would be considered and approved at a Board of Governors meeting. Ultimately, HEIs are being required to not just rely on a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check

6.7 External organisations that hire out UWL premises are also required to have a safeguarding policy which would be reviewed by UWL. External Hire had updated their terms and conditions to reflect this. Ruskin College would also be required to update their paperwork.

6.8 The APVC Student Affairs confirmed an automated IT filtering system was in place to ensure inappropriate material could not be reviewed on campus and IT facilities were monitored if attempts were made to view such material. If inappropriate material was flagged by IT Services they would refer the concern to the APVC.

6.9 Members were informed that UWL owned student accommodation at Ruskin College only.

- 6.10 Cases of safeguarding were recorded for Ofsted purposes but were not required for the OfS. The APVC Student Services confirmed there were no safeguarding concerns raised at UWL or Ruskin College.
- 6.11 **Some references in this section have been redacted.** Where there was a cause for concern, students would be seen by a member of staff immediately and actions would depend on the issues raised. Each case is individual, and staff would aim to build up a relationship with the student, so they feel safe to talk. Members queried what happened to students who did not approach a member of staff. The APVC Student Affairs informed members that if the concern was high risk a member of staff would contact a student directly, but staff also make outreach calls where students may be falling behind or not attending. At the moment there were 160 students on the Cause for Concern Register. One is high risk and staff contacted them every day.
- 6.12 All staff would be required to undertake safeguarding training on Essential Skills but staff with specific responsibilities for safeguarding would be offered additional workshops and presentations.
- 6.13 One of the outcomes highlighted by the Ofsted inspection was the lack of external engagement and the APVC Student Affairs had been building relationships with a number of external bodies including the Ealing Adult Safeguarding Partnership, West London Mental Health Trust, Oxfordshire Adult Safeguarding Board and Thames Valley Police.
- 6.14 The Student Support page had been rebranded to cover all areas of support on one page. Students could also report any concerns online.
- 6.15 Governors were reminded of the need to complete the safeguarding training via Essential Skills.
- 6.16 Members agreed that a further safeguarding session would be appropriate later in the academic year.

Action: APVC Student Affairs

- 6.17 The Board of Governors **NOTED** the presentation

7. Teaching excellence Framework (TEF) (Presentation)

- 7.1 The APVC and Dean of the London Geller College of Hospitality and Tourism provided details on the recent TEF exercise where UWL was awarded silver status.
- 7.2 The OfS introduced the TEF as part of its approach to regulating quality and standards with the first exercise taking place in 2017 followed by a subject based activity in 2019.
- 7.3 The 2023 TEF was different from previous years as a student submission, including UK partners, was included as a way of detailing the partnership between the HEI and student body. Apprenticeship activity was included in the submission. The overall aim was to review how excellence was fostered with a HEI, the strategic aims, how to achieve them and measure their success.

- 7.4 The TEF was broken down into two components, the student experience and student outcomes. The student experience covered teaching, assessment and feedback, academic support, learning resources and the student voice. Student outcomes included continuation, completion and progression. UWL received a gold rating for the student experience and a bronze rating for student outcomes.
- 7.5 Reflecting on the University Alliance (UA) mission group comparison, UWL was one of five to receive a silver rating, five received a gold rating, one a bronze rating and three results were pending an appeal. Two of the UA members were not in England so were not a part of the exercise.
- 7.6 Members were informed that the NSS results were not factored into the exercise, which may have helped Russell Group HEIs.
- 7.7 HEIs were allowed to publicise their outcomes but with 23% appealing it may be difficult for students applying through UCAS to make an informed comparison.
- 7.8 Work on TEF 2027 had already begun and would focus on student outcomes.
- 7.9 The Board of Governors **NOTED** the presentation.

8. Closing comments from the Chair

- 8.1 The Chair of the Board of Governors thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.

9. Date of next meeting

- 8.2 The next meeting of the Board of Governors would take place on Tuesday, 21 November 2023 in the Directorate Boardroom, St Mary's Road, Ealing

Signed by Derek Hicks
Chair of the Board of Governors

Date

Author: Joshua Heming
Title: University Secretary
Date: October 2023