

CONFIRMED

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Minutes of the Board of Governors meeting held on Tuesday 25 September 2012.

Present: G Camm (Chair); S Forbes; Dr M Hagen; Dr J Harrington; J Laycock; S Mills; S Moore; E Okon; Professor P Olomoloyai; Professor G Upton; G van der Lely; Professor S West.

Apologies: C Booy; I Gray; T Smallwood.

In Attendance: Professor P Gough; W Marshall; A Osborn (Clerk); J Rushforth; A Weeks (item G12.9.5).

G12.9.1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None received

MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

G12.9.2 Minutes of the meetings of 10 July and 27 July 2012

Paper G12/9/1 was received.

Members confirmed the minutes of the meetings held in July 2012.

G12.9.3 United Kingdom Border Agency

G12.9.3.1 The Vice-Chancellor updated the Board on the national picture and highlighted that London Metropolitan (LMU) was not the first University to have experienced difficulties during a UK Border Agency (UKBA) audit: a number of other institutions had had their licence suspended and subsequently reinstated.

G12.9.3.2 The most notable effect of the decision to revoke LMUs licence was significant and sustained negative coverage of UK Higher Education in the international press. In particular the Indian market had been substantially damaged by the news. Were the effects to be similar to those suffered by Australia, international recruitment across the sector could take up to five years to recover once the issues with the current visa policy were resolved.

G12.9.3.3 UWE had been scheduled to be audited by the UKBA in September; however this had been postponed until November. The Vice-Chancellor expressed confidence in the measures taken in preparation for the audit, but noted that due to the complexity of the regulations it was unlikely that any University would be totally compliant.

G12.9.3.4 Governors agreed that it would be prudent for Audit Committee to receive an update in November and a further report would be made to the full Board later the same month.

ACTION: Clerk

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

G12.9.4 Recruitment

Paper G12/09/2 was received.

G12.9.4.1 Governors received an update from the Vice-Chancellor on the national recruitment picture and UWE's own position and noted that:

- i. the University and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) had reported a 56,000 reduction in the number of students applying for a place on a higher education programme. In addition, of those that had applied, over 150,000 were likely to be unplaced;
- ii. the impact of the reduced number of students seeking a place varied significantly across the sector and work was being undertaken to ascertain which student demographics had been most affected;
- iii. anecdotal evidence suggested that there were a large number of Universities from across the mission groups that had recruited less than anticipated, although some had grown their share of the market. The full picture would only become clear following the release of statistical data collected in December.
- iv. UWE's performance broadly mirrored the trends in the wider sector. Initial indicators suggested that the University would be approximately 400 students short of the Student Number Control (SNC) issued by HEFCE. The reduction in students was not spread evenly across the institution with some faculties and departments faring better than others. Recruitment patterns generally reflected the known performance of individual programmes however the Faculty of Business and Law had been the only faculty to fulfil its recruitment targets.

G12.9.4.2 Outside of the SNC envelope UWE:

- i. performed better than anticipated in international and postgraduate student recruitment; and
- ii. increased its share of AAB+ and equivalent students;
- iii. would be able to offset a fine imposed for recruitment over the University's SNC in 2011/12 against numbers not recruited this year.

As a result of these factors, from a budgetary perspective, tuition fee income was not projected to vary significantly from the Estimates presented to the Board earlier in the year.

G12.9.4.3 The Vice-Chancellor further highlighted that recruitment under the University's allocated SNC was particularly disappointing as it exposed the University to the risk of having future SNCs recalculated on the basis of the 2012/13 intake which would, over the course of three years see 1200 students taken out in addition to any extensions of the core and margin policies. Although current discussions indicated that this would be unlikely to happen, UWE would not know for certain until HEFCE provided the 2013/14 SNC early in the New Year.

G12.9.4.4 There was also a further risk to the University's SNC figure posed through the lobbying by Russell Group Universities to extend the, already announced, unrestricted recruitment of ABB+ students to BBB+. This would provide them with increased flexibility which would potentially ameliorate their unexpected recruitment shortfalls brought on by a combination of a reduced demographic, falling numbers of AAB students and the impact of the new HE market. The University's position and that of the Alliance mission group was that in-year changes such as this would be hugely disruptive.

G12.9.4.5 During further discussion Governors noted that:

- i. whilst it had been successful in recruiting to target in the current year, the Faculty of Business and Law could come under increasing competitive pressure in the medium term as the barriers to market entry for business programmes were relatively low;
- ii. the 2012/13 recruitment cycle had been unusual in that there were very few applicants holding deferred places from the previous year.
- iii. it was anticipated that the number of students applying to university would continue to fall in line with changing demographics and that grades would also see modest deflation;
- iv. further research would be required to better understand the drivers behind the large volume of unplaced applicants before the University could effectively target that section of the market. Initial evidence suggested that a significant volume of applicants had adopted a wait and see approach by put off accepting a place with a view to securing a more competitive “deal” either closer to the start of the academic year or in 2013/14;
- v. the University also continued to explore how it could work with its network of Partner Colleges and utilise its location to best effect. Partners, including Hartpury had fared reasonably well in recruiting to UWE allocated student numbers;
- vi. whilst the University had seen a reduction in the number of students recruited the average number of tariff points required to gain a place at UWE was forecasted to marginally increase;
- vii. were there to be a recalculation of student numbers this would need to be reflected in the current portfolio review to ensure the academic character of the institution remained coherent;
- viii. the University had an excellent reputation for the employability of its graduates that should be maximised although data for the 2012 graduates would not be collected for a further six months;
- ix. that the anticipated growth in creative arts had not materialised due to a number of factors including the in-year increase in targets once places had already been offered and the availability of appropriate teaching accommodation.

G12.9.4.6 Whilst noting the under recruitment Governors concluded that there were a number of positive messages, not least the increase in the number of international students and the average tariff, on which the University could be congratulated upon.

G12.9.5 **Health and Safety**

Paper G12/09/3 was received.

G12.9.5.1 Members received a report from the Health and Safety Manager highlighting that:

- i. the previous year had seen the introduction of Health and Safety Standards and had begun to embed appropriate behaviours as well as an increase in the staff supporting Health and Safety (H&S) which meant that each Faculty and Professional Service had a dedicated contact point for H&S advice and assistance;
- ii. the introduction of centralised H&S training had seen over 1000 members of staff receive training appropriate to their area of work, in addition to 100% of staff having received fire safety training;
- iii. a follow up internal audit had recorded a step change in the University’s H&S system and as a result the system had achieved the highest possible level of assurance from the Internal Auditors;
- iv. an online reporting tool for accidents, to include near misses had been introduced and was helping to improve awareness of H&S issues and reporting routes;

- v. following the mandatory fire training there had been a 93.5% improvement in the number of people evacuating University buildings within four minutes of a fire alarm;
- vi. the H&S unit had conducted 54 audits against the newly introduced H&S standards across all the University's Faculties and Professional Services with an average score of 60% although the trend was for increasing audit performance as the systems embedded;
- vii. H&S audits provided an opportunity to assess and address weaker areas and for the first time had provided the institution with a H&S risk profile. It also provided the ability target additional and where necessary bespoke training. In addition they had highlighted where the standards introduced could themselves be improved;
- viii. in the current year the focus would be to check progress against agreed action plans whilst targeted audits would be introduced in 2013/14.

G12.9.5.2 Members warmly welcomed the report from the H&S Manager and during discussion noted that:

- i. The report conveyed an increasing culture of awareness surrounding H&S matters which had in part been driven though training to ensure senior managers understood their responsibilities and led by example;
- ii. H&S competence and the effectiveness of training delivered was assessed through subsequent audit;
- iii. The H&S unit delivered monthly training sessions and that it was part of the induction programme for new staff. Students also undertook H&S training relevant to their studies and accommodation.

G12.9.5.3 Governors commended the clarity of the report and congratulated the work of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Resources, Infrastructure and Planning) and the H&S Unit in delivering transformational change to the H&S culture at the University.

REPORTS

G12.9.6 Chair's Report

Members noted that as part a member of the Committee of University Chairs (CUC) the Chair had been looking at proposals to revise the CUC guidance to Board, with a particular view to making it less onerous and more accessible.

G12.9.7 Vice-Chancellor's Report

Paper G12/09/4 was received.

G12.9.7.1 The Vice-Chancellor informed Governors that the recent National Student Survey (NSS) results had recorded a drop, from 83% to 82%, of final year students reporting they were satisfied with their programme at UWE¹. This contrasted results from the wider sector indicating that the national trend was for increasing levels of satisfaction.

G12.9.7.2 Whilst significant work was being undertaken to identify the root cause of UWE's underperformance in contrast with comparator institutions, a number of factors had already been identified, including:

- i. lower than average performance in the areas that the sector as a whole struggled with. This included lower than average performance in the assessment and feedback section of the survey;
- ii. some programmes in the bottom quartile of their subject area were large enough to significantly influence the University's aggregate scores;
- iii. a revised approach to reporting of and monitoring Faculty and Service actions following the retirement of the Dean of Students.

¹ Based on the percentage of students responding positively to question 22 of the National Student Survey.

- G12.9.7.3** Combined with the other balanced scorecard criteria the Executive had a strong data set, at programme level, of what was working and what was not. Although it remained important to resolve them, many issues were of a more minor nature. Others would require greater intervention and individuals would be held to account for the student experience within their areas of responsibility.
- G12.9.7.4** The Students' Union President reiterated that it was critical for the University to resolve the myriad of smaller issues that were creating a sense of dissatisfaction among a significant, and now growing, minority of students. From a student perspective priorities for action would include adhering to stated feedback policies, notably the four week turnaround time and providing timetables further in advance. Members also noted that for the first time the satisfaction with the Students' Union had been included within the NSS and despite a lower per capita spend UWESU had significantly outperformed the University of Bristol Students' Union.
- G12.9.7.5** During extensive discussion Governors expressed their disappointment that the student experience at the University appeared to be declining, particularly when taken in context of the increase in the sector averages. In particular they noted that:
- i. whilst the NSS results were important for UWEs reputation, it was critical that the University focused on improving the student experience not for league table position, but because it would be the right thing to do for students;
 - ii. the Executive Deans and Heads of Professional Services were ultimately responsible for the performance within areas under their control and that at a programme level, programme leaders must take responsibility for, and ownership of, the student experience;
 - iii. subject to further discussion at the Strategic Planning and Performance Committee to consider the actions being taken and their anticipated effectiveness, the Board would reserve the right to introduce central targets on indicators considered to have the greatest impact on the students satisfaction with their programme;
 - iv. whilst there were some consistently high performing programmes in the institution there appeared to be a significant tail of programmes performing below the University and their own national subject averages which needed to be addressed;
 - v. there were no firm standards articulated in respect of the student experience and that many organisations found these invaluable to inform expectations of all parties, staff development, and performance management.
 - vi. although not a defined standard the opening of all blackboard content to all students and staff would highlight the inconstant nature of learning materials between modules and help showcase and disseminate good practice. Similarly the introduction of the personal tutoring system for first years had highlighted staff requiring development to support their interactions with students;
 - vii. UWE now had considerable ground to make up compared to the rest of the sector which would be looking to further increase satisfaction and currently it was difficult for the Board to discern a consistent student focused culture across the University;
 - viii. there needed to be complete focus from the management to deliver for students where the University was not getting it right. Persistent poor performance across student experience indicators in particular areas should prompt a discussion on the future of the programme and/or its management.

- G12.9.7.6** Governors requested that:
- i. A full list of programme performance across the range of student experience KPIs be provided at the earliest opportunity;
 - ii. Strategic Planning and Performance Committee considers the institutions approach to improving the student experience, its likely effectiveness and timescales for implementation reporting back to the November 2012 meeting of the Board of Governors for further discussion.

Action: Vice-Chancellor/Clerk

G12.9.8 Accounts

Governors welcomed an oral report from the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Commercial Director and Company Secretary) which, based on the management accounts and subject to audit adjustments, indicated that after FRS17 adjustments the University could achieve a surplus close to 6% for the 2011/12 academic year; a fuller update would be provided to Finance, Estates and IT Committee. Following on from the previous discussion, Members reminded the Executive that it was essential that surpluses were used to support improvements to the student experience.

G12.9.9 Masterplanning

- G12.9.9.1** The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Commercial Director and Company Secretary) circulated the draft development plan for the Frenchay Campus which would be submitted to South Gloucestershire Council for outline planning consent in October. The plan represented a snapshot in time and provided a vision for the use of the estate over the next 20-25 years, and as such would likely evolve further over time. Nonetheless it would be important to develop this with the council now in order to minimise future planning issues.

- G12.9.9.2** During further discussion of the Frenchay Campus Governors noted that the:

- i. UWE Stadium to be constructed by Bristol Rovers Football Club had been granted planning permission subject to a number of section 106 conditions which remained under negotiation;
- ii. bus link road, Longdown Avenue, between Abby Wood and UWE had opened shortening bus journey times to and from the campus;
- iii. UWE International College in collaboration with Kaplan had opened following the refurbishment of P block;
- iv. required notice to vacate building one had been issued by HP. This would result in a loss of income but would enable the university to fully incorporate the building in its development plans;
- v. Wallscourt Foundation was continuing with the sale of the land East of Coldharbour Lane;
- vi. previously discussed commercial opportunity with a third party organisation remained a possibility although planning conditions and delays faced by the organisation concerned had resulted in a slower pace of negotiations.

G12.9.10 ITEMS TO NOTE

Paper G12/09/5 was received.

Governors noted the minutes of Board Committees presented and the use of the mandate agreed at the special meeting of the Board in July.

G12.9.11 APPOINTMENTS

Governors congratulated William Marshall on his appointment to the new post of Pro Vice-Chancellor (Commercial Director and Company Secretary) noting that the Director of Finance Post would be filled by William Liew, from the University of Bristol, on the 12 November. The Vice-Chancellor also reported that following the retirement of Elaine Moger, Lucy Wicksteed had been appointed as his Executive Assistant from the 5 November.