



BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Minutes of the Board of Governors meeting held on Tuesday 29 January 2013.

Present: G Camm (Chair); S Forbes; I Gray; Dr J Harrington; J Laycock; S Mills; S Moore; E Okon; Professor P Olomolaiye; T Smallwood; G van der Lely; Professor S West.

Apologies: C Booy; Dr M Hagen; Professor G Upton.

In Attendance: Professor P Gough; W Liew; W Marshall; A Osborn (Deputy Clerk); J Rushforth (Clerk).

G13.01.1 Declarations of Interest

None received.

G13.01.2 Minutes of the meeting 26 November 2012

Paper G13/01/1 was received and approved.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

G13.01.3 UWE Strategy 2020

Paper G13/01/2 was received.

G13.01.3.1 Governors received a presentation from the Vice-Chancellor highlighting that:

- i. since the introduction of the 2007 – 2012 strategy, activity had centred around structural and business change which had resulted in some staff becoming disengaged from the institution and attention being drawn away from the student experience;
- ii. the changes made had provided the University with a strong financial position, future approaches would need to take account of a changing external landscape dominated by increased competition from competitors and private providers together with shifting demographics and demand;
- iii. the draft strategy had been prepared in consultation with a wide range of internal and external stakeholders which indicated that UWE was well known within the region for being inclusive, locally connected and providing strong professional education programmes;
- iv. the consultation had also identified that knowledge of the University dissipated rapidly beyond the wider region, the unique characteristics of the University were not clearly defined by the current INSPIRE framework and the physical location of UWE had been under-played.

G13.01.3.2 The UWE 2020 Strategy sought to address both the weakness and the external factors by clearly articulating the institutions core purpose and setting out three central areas where the institution could realistically become a market leader:

- i. the provision of professionally accredited and practice-orientated programmes;
- ii. connecting to and working with the local and regional economy;
- iii. being digitally agile and responsive.

- G13.01.3.3** In order to achieve this, the institution would need to focus on four key areas:
- i. delivering outstanding learning and teaching;
 - ii. equipping ready and able graduates;
 - iii. delivering research impact; and
 - iv. civic engagement and leadership.

These in turn would be supported by work streams in a further three, enabling areas:

- i. staff, performance and development;
- ii. partnerships and networks;
- iii. resources estate and infrastructure.

Across all areas there would also be greater clarity on decision making with a revised approach to planning and performance.

- G13.01.3.4** During extensive discussion members noted that:
- i. although the strategy had been worded to support internal discussion and buy in, it would be important to ensure that it worked for different audiences. In particular the current version would be unlikely to engage external stakeholders;
 - ii. the ambition to be the best practice-orientated learning institution played well with the nature of the University and would develop an appropriate space in the market: a successful blend of curriculum and experience had the potential to be a strong USP for the institution. It would need to be supported by appropriate key performance indicators and be carefully pitched and monitored to ensure that it did not imply a move towards a teaching only institution or limit the market in the face of changing demographics and study patterns.
 - iii. the strategy had been designed to address the anticipated market changes by articulating principles which should transcend fluctuating market and environmental factors;
 - iv. the development of ready and able graduates as a priority areas chimed well with business which accepted that qualifications were a convenient way of shortlisting candidates but often appointed on the basis of attitude, soft and transferable skills demonstrated by applicants;
 - v. UWE had a strong brand reputation locally and internationally, but more work would be required to develop the brand in the national context as currently there was little to differentiate the institution from competitors;
 - vi. being digitally connected would be unlikely to be a strong USP for the institution given connectivity and contemporary technology had become hygiene factors for students. Additionally the rise of Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) and other online course providers would make it difficult for UWE to carve out a strong reputation in the arena;
 - vii. the retention of partnerships and networks as an enabler to the ambitions and priorities identified within the strategy would be considered in light of on-going work to define the spectrum of partnerships operating at the University, their effectiveness and the results of the recent market research exercise. A key requirement would be that going forward staff understood “partnership” and that the supporting structures were appropriate to engage with, and maintain, partnerships.

- G13.01.3.5** Governors welcomed the direction of the draft strategy and requested that the Executive carefully consider, prior to presentation of the final version, market and demographic trends including postgraduate and part time provision. Members requested that Strategic Planning and Performance Committee consider the KPIs which would be applied to the new strategy.

ACTION: Vice-Chancellor/Clerk

G13.01.4 Portfolio and Planning

G13.01.4.1 Members received a presentation from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) on the conclusions of the portfolio review, outlining:

- i. the internal performance ranking of UWE's subject areas and the required distance to travel for each to meet the University's strategic objective of having all programmes within the upper quartiles;
- ii. that the portfolio review had identified four requirements that would be expected of all programmes:
 - a. strategic fit – programmes supporting UWEs overarching ambitions and priorities;
 - b. academic performance – all programmes to be within the upper quartiles by 2016/17;
 - c. academic breadth – the extent to which there is a comprehensive suite of cognate academic activities from undergraduate teaching through to high quality research;
 - d. financial viability – the subject makes a positive financial contribution.
- iii. following examination of each of the subject areas, three options were available: invest, instigate specific intensive support and exit. The outcome had provisionally recommended an exit in 2013/14 from Politics and International Relations and Music Therapy with a step reduction in the activities associated with Planning and Education and Learning Development.
- iv. that alongside the recommendations to exit there would be a number of subject areas which would receive investment in order to maximise their potential and support a step improvement where necessary;
- v. an extra meeting of Academic Board had been convened to discuss the results of the review and provide advice to the Vice-Chancellor so that a final decision could be made in sufficient time so as not to adversely affect existing applicants.

G13.01.4.2 During discussion members noted that:

- i. of the areas recommended for exit only Politics and International Relations appeared within the data tables as Education and Learning Development fell within a wider subject area and Music Therapy was a small post graduate programme;
- ii. the challenges posed by Mathematics were considerable as a result of it competing with programmes offered by more traditional institutions yet being essential to the delivery of a number of other subject areas at the University. As a result the University would be including it within the subjects identified for specific support;
- iii. some low performing programmes had not been recommended for exit as the emerging indicators suggested improvement and an element of market stabilisation. In addition, and similarly to Mathematics, a number of the weaker areas identified, including Nursing and Computing Science, demonstrated strong strategic fit and therefore would be provided with support to develop them to their full potential;
- iv. where Programmes and subject areas were recommended for exit numbers would be reallocated to allow growth in areas of strong demand. This would be in line with existing practice to regularly review targets for all programmes to ensure that the University fully utilised the student numbers available to it. The earlier reallocations were made the easier it would be to accommodate resourcing issues in relation to space and staffing.

- v. The timing of programme/subject area closures would also be difficult as there were no convenient times in the applications cycle to close programmes for the forthcoming academic year. Instead the University would need to support applicants to find suitable alternatives either within UWE or elsewhere.
- vi. the University would always support existing students to complete their chosen degrees should a decision be made to close a programme to new entrants. This would result in a significant amount of time passing before savings could be realised.

G13.01.4.3 Governors endorsed the subject areas and programmes identified by the portfolio review for exit, investment and intervention. The Chair was granted delegated authority to agree final proposals from the Vice-Chancellor following discussion at Academic Board. Members requested that the final outcome and Academic Board discussion to be reported to the next meeting.

ACTION: Vice-Chancellor/Clerk

ITEM FOR APPROVAL

G13.01.5 Amendment to Bank Mandate

Governors approved the Director of Finance, William Liew as an authorised signatory for all the University's bank accounts and accordingly authorised the Chair and Vice-Chancellor to sign the required mandate.

REPORTS

G13.01.6 Annual Report from Academic Board

Paper G13/01/3 was received.

G13.01.6.1 Governors welcomed assurance provided by the report and the Vice-Chancellor that the University's academic provision met or exceeded a satisfactory standard. They further noted an update on the on-going review of Academic Board effectiveness highlighting that whilst the structures had been adjusted, the composition may be further developed to provide greater representation of non-executive staff on the committees, this in turn would promote greater discussion and challenge of the Executive over academic matters. In addition further work would be required to continue to build an effective dialogue between the Board of Governors and Academic Board.

G13.01.6.2 During discussion members expressed sustained concern about the provision of assessment feedback in a timely manner as students continued to express reservations over the four week policy. Following discussion at Academic Board in December the Vice-Chancellor confirmed that further guidelines would be published to staff providing the definition of "four weeks" and its inclusion as a performance measure for staff and departments.

G13.01.6.3 Governors requested that Strategic Planning and Performance Committee receive a further update on the implementation of the agreed definition of "four weeks", focusing in particular on performance against the measure and consistency across the institution.

ACTION: Clerk/Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic)

G13.01.7 Chair's Report

Members noted that the diversity of Governing Bodies continued to come under increasing scrutiny. In response Nominations and Governance Committee had drawn up a framework for Governor recruitment based on skills diversity which would be complemented by the use of different recruitment channels to promote demographic diversity; in order to inform the channels used members would receive, and were encouraged to complete, an anonymous equality monitoring form.

G13.01.8 Vice-Chancellor's Report

Paper G13/01/04 was received.

G13.01.8.1 The Board welcomed the news that the planning phases for the UWE Stadium had almost been completed and noted that the University would further develop its communication strategy over the project to ensure that staff and students understood that the University was not investing in the development of the stadium and simply leasing the land to Bristol Rovers Football Club.

G13.01.8.2 Governors also welcomed the University's success in the Stonewall employer index and congratulated the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Partnerships, Diversity and Civic Engagement) and their team for the work that had led to the result.

G13.01.9 Finance Report

Paper G13/01/05 was received.

G13.01.9.1 Members noted that the Department of Business Innovation & Skills grant letter to HEFCE provided a clear indication that student number controls would be reduced should institutions under-recruit in 2013/14. Current applications continued to be volatile, but appeared to be up on the previous cycle, and marginally down against the benchmark 2010/11 levels.

G13.01.9.2 The Director of Finance further noted that the University's balance sheet would begin to change as the Masterplan gathered pace as the value of fixed assets were revised down and land transfers, in particular the lease to Bristol Rovers, were realised.

G12.11.13 Date of Next Meeting

20 – 21 March 2013, Bowood House.