

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Governors held at 3.00pm on Tuesday, 6 October 2009 in the Dartington Suite, Wallscourt Farmhouse, Frenchay campus

Present: Gillian Camm (Chairman), Bob Barnett, Rosamund Blomfield-Smith, Chris Booy, Prof Paul Gough, Dr Jane Harrington, Wil Harris, John Laycock, Katy Phillips, Rt Rev Barry Rogerson, Graham van der Lely, Prof Steve West

Apologies: Sherrie Eugene-Hart, Iain Gray, Sonia Mills, Lise Seager, Prof Graham Upton

In Attendance: Bill Marshall, Katie Owen-Jones

CHAIRMAN

G09.10.1 Pursuant to Article 8.1, the Board confirmed Gillian Camm as Chairman.

MINUTES

G09.10.2 The minutes of the meeting held on 7 July 2009 were confirmed as an accurate record.

Minute G09.10.3-4 are confidential to the Board.

LANGUAGES

G09.10.5 Further to minute G09.7.17, the Vice-Chancellor expected to receive a plan from the Department by the end of this month. The aim of the review was that there should continue to be language provision, but differently and focussed on future needs. If the plan was satisfactory, it would be implemented as early as possible. A progress report would be made to the next meeting.

WIDENING PARTICIPATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

G09.10.6 Chris Croudace and Professor Geoff Channon made presentations to the Board on widening participation and the UWE Federation, covering: the Widening Participation Strategic Assessment; how widening participation was embedded in the work of faculties; UWE's success in recruiting students from under-represented groups; the range of outreach work undertaken, number of students involved and the contribution to the local community; the resource commitment to widening participation, and difficulties of comparing level of activity and expenditure with that at other universities; and the purposes and development of the UWE Federation. The presentations led into discussions about some of the opportunities, issues and challenges for the University.

G09.10.7 Main points included:
- that the extent and success of the University's widening participation and outreach work remained largely unrecognised outside the University.

Those partners with which the University worked were very appreciative and supportive, and were probably the best placed to help advertise what was being achieved;

- some Governors spoke of their experience of working with academies and schools where they saw aspirations of young people being changed by the involvement of the University;
- key issues to be addressed, including the potential impact on widening participation of internal and external policies, such as UWE's intention to increase the tariff on entry and the possible lifting of the cap on fees;
- the geographical range of the UWE Federation: whether, now that the Federation was established, it should extend beyond the region, and if so how the principle of collegiality could be maintained;
- the benefits, or otherwise, of encouraging exclusive relationships: Most of UWE's FE partners had multiple HE relationships, which reflected UWE's late entry into the field and also their need to mitigate the risk of universities withdrawing funding. Exclusive relationships would also require more input by the University. The main exclusive relationship currently was with Hartpury where there were significant numbers of students and programmes: it was unlikely that UWE would form a similar relationship with another college;
- the challenge of embedding a higher education culture in FE colleges, how more work was now being done at programme level to support this;
- improving employer engagement particularly in informing programme development; the need to balance a variety of employer needs and also with providing a broader educational experience on degree courses; opportunities to meet specific employer needs in other types of provision which might be best done in partnership with FE colleges;
- how Foundation degrees fitted alongside HNDs and degree routes, and whether they were fully understood yet by employers and students;
- the UWE Federation in the context of no growth in student numbers, UWE's commitment to maintain programmes and relationships whilst retaining the flexibility to move numbers around from under-recruiting programmes;
- the potential longer term thinking on 'community colleges' and whether they could provide a threat or an opportunity.

G09.10.8 Further work was being done on the development of the Federation in the new financial context, remaining flexible to respond to the position facing other public services and following the next election. It was **AGREED** that at the next awayday there should be a discussion about UWE as 'Partnership University' and what that meant, including for the UWE Federation strategy and developments such as in Swindon.

G09.10.9 The Vice-Chancellor reported on progress this year in raising tariff levels for entry, the target that would be set for 2010 entry and the longer term aim. A fuller report, including by faculty, would be provided for the next meeting of the Board.

GOVERNANCE

G09.10.10 It was **AGREED** to defer the items on governance to a future meeting of the Board.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

G09.10.11 The Board received a report by external consultants on the University's health and safety management arrangements and a brief commentary setting out the

next steps being taken by the Executive (Paper G09/10/7). The Vice-Chancellor presented the paper, reporting on: the background to his commissioning of the review; the existing health and safety arrangements; the current focus for the central unit on advice rather than enforcement; steps already taken to enhance the health and safety resource in Estates. He also acknowledged that the Board had had insufficient information in the past to be able to judge whether the arrangements were satisfactory, though members had asked questions to assure themselves. The plan now being drawn up was for a standards and compliance approach to health and safety, and would be implemented as soon as possible with the additional investment necessary.

G09.10.12 Governors agreed that the situation was unacceptable and expressed strongly their concern that they had not been made aware of it sooner. Even though they were assured that the level of risk to the health and safety of staff and students was relatively low, the necessary procedures and processes appeared not to be in place and that had to be addressed as soon as possible. They supported the commitment to put additional resources into this area. The discussion also covered: support for changing the role of the central unit from being advisory; unsatisfactory reporting mechanisms in the past; that managers needed to understand their responsibilities and be supported to fulfil them; that this had not previously been identified on the risk register. In assessing the level of risk that the University was currently exposed to, it was emphasised that current practice throughout the institution was generally appropriate and not 'unsafe', the main failings related to policy, and how it was implemented and enforced. It was noted that visits from the Health and Safety Executive and annual insurance checks had not raised significant concerns.

G09.10.13 The Board **ENDORSED** the steps already being taken and urged further action as quickly as possible. A full plan for rectifying the situation was required for the next meeting of the Board, or circulated sooner if it was available.

NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY

G09.10.14 A paper outlining the key findings of the National Student Survey (NSS) in relation to UWE and action to be taken in response, Paper G09/10/8, was received. The Vice-Chancellor presented the report, noting: that the University's position overall had stabilised in spite of the effort put into addressing areas of poor performance; the excellent results in some areas; the main area of poor performance across the sector and for UWE remained assessment and feedback, and possible explanations for that; and, that the impact of the graduate development programme would first be seen in 2010.

G09.10.15 The discussion focussed on what the University had already done to address some of the issues raised by the survey. Various points and suggestions were made, including: making students more aware of the way the University was responding to this and other feedback from them; that over-concentration on assessment and feedback might not be helpful, as this was just one element of the academic experience that needed to be looked at as a whole; and, the variability of experience across the institution. The senior management team would be prioritising action and would take those points into account.

G09.10.16 Members felt that it would be helpful to have more information and discussion about assessment, feedback and the student experience of those things, including qualitative information. It was **AGREED** that a future briefing session for the Board would be on student assessment and feedback.

FRENCHAY CAMPUS DEVELOPMENT

- G09.10.17 Received, Paper G09/10/4, an update on planning activity since the July meeting of the Board. Information to be used in the forthcoming consultation exercise was tabled. The Vice-Chancellor reported that the project was still on target for a final version to come to the November meeting. Current issues included: transport routes; managing South Gloucestershire Council's desire to see facilities opened to the local community with preserving the integrity of the University as an academic environment; sustainability; and, balancing specialist and general accommodation for learning and teaching. The current assumption was that Building 2 would be retained for the foreseeable future, and the team was working with Hewlett Packard for them to vacate Building 1 as soon as possible. There was also an ongoing discussion with HEFCE about them releasing that building.

VICE-CHANCELLOR'S REPORT

- G09.10.18 Received and noted: a summary of matters recently considered by the Senior Management Team, and not appearing elsewhere on the agenda (Paper G09/10/5); and, the slides for the Vice-Chancellor's presentations to staff to be held at the end of October (Paper G09/10/6).
- G09.10.19 The Vice-Chancellor noted that his paper 'Investing for Future Growth' had been sent to all staff. He hoped through the paper and the roadshows to engage staff with University's future and what that might look like. The paper would also be discussed at the next meeting of Academic Board. His view was that there were many uncertainties ahead. In order for the University to emerge as a strong institution, some difficult decisions and issues would have to be tackled and it was important that some of those were progressed quickly. The Vice-Chancellor would be looking to the Board to support the overall proposals and associated plan and objectives.

CORPORATE ETHICS POLICY

- G09.10.20 A revised Corporate Ethics Policy and an implementation plan was received, Paper G09/10/3. Subject to some minor points of clarification, the Board **APPROVED** the Policy.

The Board received a number of documents for information, as follows.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

- G09.10.21 The Board received a report of a recent meeting of a Governors' Appeal Panel (Paper G09/10/9).

ANNUAL BUSINESS PLAN

- G09.10.22 Members received an outline of the Board's business for the year, including standing items (Paper G09/10/10).

CORPORATE SEAL

- G09.10.23 Noted, the documents sealed since the last meeting (Paper G09/10/11).

DATES OF NEXT MEETING

G09.10.24 24 November 2009.

Meeting closed 6.10 pm.