

University Board Meeting (By MS Teams video conference)
Minutes of a meeting held on 1 October 2021

Members Present

Prof Richard Conder (Chair)	Chair of the University Board
Paula Alliston	Professional & Support Staff Member
Jim Andrews	Chief Operating Officer (COO)
John Beswick	Independent Board Member
Prof Carol Clark	Senate Member of the Board
Prof Carol Evans	Independent Board Member
Karima Fahmy	Independent Board Member
Dr Lois Farquharson	Academic Staff Board Member
Maggie Frost	Independent Board Member
David Furniss	Independent Board Member
Karl Hoods	Independent Board Member (Item 4.2 onwards)
Stuart Jones	Independent Board Member
David Kane	Independent Board Member
Jean Lang (Deputy Chair)	Independent Board Member
Naomie Lebe	President, Students' Union at Bournemouth University
Sara Luder	Independent Board Member
Prof Tim McIntyre-Bhatty	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC)
Tola Oloyede	Independent Board Member
Prof John Vinney	Vice-Chancellor (VC)

In attendance

David Reeve (Interim Director of Finance (IDoF)), Geoff Rayment (Corporate Governance and Committees Manager); Deborah Wakely (Clerk to the Board). Presenting for PwC at Item 1: Karen Best, Tim Arnold and Steve Blackmore. Observing: Robert Williams (Independent Board Member from January 2022).

Meeting minutes

1. CPD Briefing: Financial Sector Update (PwC)

21/001 The Chair welcomed Mr Armstrong, Ms Best and Mr Blackmore of PwC who gave a presentation on current perspectives in higher education financing. The presentation covered the financial health of the sector (reasonable overall with Covid impact being mitigated, but with debt continuing to rise). Reserves at BU remained [Redacted] compared to others in the University's peer group. Possible steps for HEIs to

improve financial resilience were presented, along with the current perspective from lenders. Pension developments were set out in respect of both LGPS and TPS.

2. Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of Interest (Chair)

21/002 Apologies were noted from Ms Ward. The Chair welcomed newly appointed independent member Professor Carol Evans to her first meeting of the Board, and Robert Williams, who was observing the meeting pending the start of his term of office in January 2022.

21/003 The Chair invited any declarations of interests and noted that Prof Evans held visiting professorial roles at Cardiff and Southampton universities as well as a role at Advance HE. There were no other new or relevant declarations.

3. Minutes of the Board Meeting Held on 9th July 2021 (Chair)

21/004 The minutes of the 9 July 2021 meeting were **approved** as an accurate record.

3.1. Matters Arising and Actions Register (Chair)

21/005 The Actions Register was **noted**. All actions had been completed, were covered under the main agenda items (below) or were not yet due, apart from action 178 (Royal London House disposal) which was ongoing. The COO advised the Board that the preferred bidder had now withdrawn their bid and the focus of negotiations had moved to the reserve bid, which was still above the market value, and Savills were continuing to advise.

3.2. Report back on written resolutions, deeds and contracts signed and Chair's actions (Chair)

21/006 The report was **noted**.

4. Strategic Matters

4.1. Vice-Chancellor's Update (VC)

21/007 The VC highlighted key points from his update report. The new term had begun with most activity predominantly taking place on campus and safety therefore remained the key operational focus. Work was progressing on actions following the review of CMA compliance. Student recruitment remained strong and was on target for domestic undergraduate students, with international student numbers also looking positive. The National Student Survey (NSS) results had been disappointing, with BU student satisfaction dropping by 19% compared to a 7% sector average drop. The University's position in two league tables had also fallen, in part due to the NSS result. Preparations were underway for the 2020 and 2021 graduation ceremonies which would take place in the week of 1st to 5th November and Board members would shortly receive invitations to attend.

21/008 The Deputy Chair noted media coverage regarding Covid prevention and control measures taken in other institutions. The COO explained the approach being taken at BU which currently included the requirement for face-coverings in indoor settings among other safety measures. All universities were conducting their own risk assessments which would be impacted by factors such as the space available and ventilation. BU's requirements on campus currently exceeded government requirements off campus and ensuring compliance remained challenging.

4.2. BU 2025 Overview (Review and Forward Look), incorporating:

4.2.1. Student Experience (Including National Student Survey Results) (VC/DVC)

4.2.2. BU2025 Financial Plan Principles (VC/IDoF)

21/009 The VC presented an overview of BU2025 progress and next steps. The University had experienced two difficult years resulting from the Covid pandemic and issues of financial sustainability. The Financial Plan was now on track but research activity had fallen back during the pandemic restrictions and while staff prioritised education. BU2025 provided a clear direction, but the campus premium had been difficult to deliver due to the pandemic. The pace of internal investment in some Strategic Investment Areas had slowed in order to build financial sustainability. Investment in people and culture remained an area of focus, including health, safety and wellbeing, leadership, and equality and diversity.

21/010 On graduate outcomes data there was a relatively strong picture, with BU performing above sector average across all Departments for students going into further study or highly skilled employment. Continuation and completion rates were generally good.

21/011 Turning to student experience, the NSS results had come as a shock to many staff and been very disappointing. Detailed data was appended to the VC's update report and showed variation across programmes and departments. BU scores had dropped in all areas, however, with responses to questions relating to Learning Resources and Learning Community dropping the most. Student expectations had not been met and the impact of the pandemic on students being able to undertake work placements had also had a negative effect. The results also showed that communications about changes to the 'no detriment' policy and assessments could have been clearer. The results and feedback indicated there was a failure in some areas to adapt programmes well for remote learning and to meet expectations for supporting student wellbeing. The VC briefly summarised survey results for Postgraduate (both taught and research students) which were both more positive than the NSS results. The NSS results however, would impact on national league table rankings.

21/012 The VC outlined the plans to address Student Experience issues in response to the NSS results. Face-to-face delivery was returning this year and academics were focusing on core quality. There would be reviews of how staff spend their time (the balance between research and education); the use of technology and online resources; and providing a personalised student experience. There would also be a focus on improving communications with students, including the establishment of a Student Voice Committee chaired by the VC.

21/013 Looking forward, the BU2025 financial assumptions were being reviewed and updated and proposals would be presented to FRC and the Board. It would be necessary to re-think the capital investment plans to ensure they were being taken forward in a way that was financially sustainable and funded through surpluses rather than borrowing. It may also be necessary to review the University's ambitions on student/staff ratios, and research income forecasts would be scaled back [Redacted].

21/014 The Chair opened the discussion by emphasising the Board's responsibilities in respect of student experience. Going forward the Board would need to engage more with students as recommended in the independent review of governance. The Chair proposed that a new Board Committee, which would sit alongside ARG and FRC as a major Board Committee should be established to consider matters of student experience. Membership could include student and staff perspectives and be chaired by an independent Board Member.

21/015 Mr Jones noted that the drop in the NSS scores relative to other institutions was dramatic and could impact on future recruitment. It seemed that the existing student feedback mechanisms had failed to identify the problems and he asked whether there was any further information on this and whether anything could be learned from the approaches taken at other institutions. The VC explained that the NSS surveys final year students every year between February and April. The University undertook samples and reviewed programmes in-year. Student forums were in place in Faculties. Mid-Unit assessments were

undertaken, but these had been relatively positive and had failed to identify the issues subsequently revealed in the NSS. The DVC added that MUSE, which surveyed all students mid-semester, comprised only a sub-set of the full set of questions that were used in the NSS and reported at unit level. Going forward mid-cycle monitoring would be reviewed and needed to ensure that a programme level view was available in the hope that this would provide a better lens for analysing and responding to student feedback.

21/016 Members asked what information was available on the approach taken by other institutions to the NSS, and one noted that some Universities had appointed senior managers specifically to manage league table performance. The VC explained that anecdotally it was thought that practice varied widely across the sector. BU always exceeded the sector average for NSS participation rates and this was achieved through effective communications rather than incentivising campaigns. Ms Luder stressed the importance of addressing student experience improvements rather than seeking ways to manage the process. She shared her own current experience of being a student at another university and noted how relatively small variations in approach could make a huge difference to students' satisfaction and how well supported they felt – for example, academic staff making themselves available to talk to students individually and take questions after lectures.

21/017 Members supported the proposal to establish an Executive Student Voice Committee and a new Student Experience sub-committee of the Board, adding that it was important that the SVC encouraged real, honest engagement. Mr Kane felt that it was important to ensure that the impact of any measures put in place to improve student experience could be assessed and reviewed. He also asked how it was reflected in academic staff performance management and objectives. Other members stressed that it was important that staff are given the capacity and skills to be able to make the required improvements.

21/018 Prof Evans agreed that a sense of identity and belonging mattered to students, and a sense of receiving a fair deal in comparison to others. The latter may be particularly relevant when comparing students who had been impacted severely by the Covid lockdown with the experience of those joining the University after most of the restrictions had been lifted. She noted that there were certain 'trigger' questions in the results, which impacted on the overall satisfaction score, namely questions on whether the course was well organised and the provision of timely feedback - it was important to establish a consistent baseline in these areas. Mrs Alliston added that it was important to recognise the key role that staff in student facing roles played at programme level, including the partnership between programme leaders and the professional services staff in faculty.

21/019 The SUBU President was asked about the student response to the NSS results. She explained that the Vice-President (Education) was in discussion with the DVC about the key focus areas and ensuring a timely response to student feedback. She added that it was important to address student experience from the very beginning of the students' time with BU and SUBU had created a one-stop-shop with a particular focus on supporting first year students.

21/020 Mr Furniss noted the impact on staff of the results but also emphasised the Board's responsibility to meet its trustee duties and to act in the best interests of the students as the University's charitable beneficiaries. He welcomed the proposals for a new Board committee to focus on student experience and recommended that the terms of reference provided for independent expert review to ensure externality to inform the Committee and Board's view of adjustments required. The VC agreed to bring a further report on plans and progress to the next Board meeting. The Chair noted that draft terms of reference for the new Board Committee would also be presented for consideration by the Board.

Action: Provide an update on actions to address the NSS results and student experience to the November Board meeting.

Action by: VC

Action: Provide a first draft of Board Student Experience Committee terms of reference for consideration by the November Board (noting access to independent expertise)

Action by: Chair/Clerk

21/021 On the BU2025 Financial Plan, the Chair invited Mr Furniss as FRC Chair to comment. Mr Furniss welcomed the principles set out in the VC's presentation and the proposals for reviewing the BU2025 financial assumptions and targets to reflect the current position. It was agreed that FRC would review the proposals in further detail prior to presentation to the Board for approval.

4.3. Status update on Board review action plan (Chair/Clerk)

21/022 The Clerk to the Board presented a status update on the implementation of the recommendations arising from the independent review of governance. The Board noted the actions that were complete, those that were ongoing and agreed a revised deadline for one item of the November Board. It was recommended that the Board focus on recommendations 15,16 and 17 relating to academic governance and oversight. The matter of creating a new academic sub-committee of the Board had been discussed (in the context of student experience) and proposals would be brought back to the Board for consideration. On the recommendation for an independent review of academic governance, further planning would be needed on the precise timing of commencement given the limitations on capacity and other priorities before the end of the calendar year. A proposed timeline would be developed by the VC as Chair of Senate and reporting brought back to a future Board meeting. Nominations Committee would also present recommendations from its July meeting regarding student membership of the Board at the November Board.

Action: Propose a start date for the independent review of academic governance as recommended in the Board review.

Action by: VC

5. Any Other Business

21/023 There was no other business.

6. Date of Next Meeting

Friday, 26th November 2021, 9.00am to 12.30pm. Consideration was being given as to how this meeting would be held. Members would be advised of the final decision in due course.