

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Minutes of a meeting of the Board of Governors held on Thursday 21 September 2017 at 5pm in the Waldegrave Drawing Room, St Mary's University, Twickenham.

MINUTES

Present

Rt Rev Richard Moth (Chair)
Mrs Sue Handley-Jones (Vice-Chair)
Professor Francis Campbell (Vice Chancellor)
Professor Edward Acton
Fr Richard Finn (end of Item 6 onwards)
Mrs June Mulroy
Mr Dave Hartnett
Mr Conal Baxter (SMSU President)
Professor Anne Moran
Ms Kristen Pilbrow (Support Staff Governor)

In attendance

Miss Anais Hemetsberger (Student Observer)
Ms Elizabeth Bell (Head of Corporate Planning, to end of Item)
Ms Sharron Costley (Finance Director)
Ms Jo Blunden (Senior Director of People)
Ms Nadine Burdjugow (Assistant to the Clerk to the Board of Governors)
Professor John Charmley (Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic Strategy))
Rt Hon Ruth Kelly (Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research & Enterprise))
Professor John Brewer (Interim Pro Vice-Chancellor (Global Engagement))

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND WELCOMES

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Jeffrey Cottle and the Clerk to the

The Board welcomed the following staff to their first Board meeting in their new posts:

Ms Sharron Costley (Finance Director)
Professor John Brewer (Interim Pro Vice Chancellor (Global Engagement))
Conal Baxter (SU President)
Ms Kristen Pilbrow (Support Staff Governor).
Miss Anais Hemetsberger was welcomed as a student observer.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3 CHAIR'S BUSINESS

3.1 Membership of the Board

The Chair confirmed that Noreen Doyle would commence her three year term as Governor on the Board and Claire Doyle would commence a one year term as Governor with a view to being extended for a further two years in 2018.

4 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting on 29 June 2017 were approved subject to the following amendments being made:

Item 15.5: the number in favour of the tuition fee proposal was 10 not 11.

Item 16.1: Should read Pro Vice Chancellor (Research & Enterprise) not (Research & Innovation).

5 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION OR APPROVAL

6 VICE-CHANCELLOR'S REPORT

Paper 1 refers

6.1 The Vice Chancellor paid tribute to the Students Union and the Interim PVC (Global Engagement) on their efforts during clearing.

6.2 The Vice Chancellor reported on the HEFCE visit which took place earlier in the day at which the following points were raised:

- HEFCE stated that St Mary's is the only institution they've visited where students and members of the governing body meet, ensuring transparency.
- HEFCE wants to know what St Mary's needs in order to make budget this year and if the growth targets that have been set are realistic.
- HEFCE stated that the market in the UK, especially London, is volatile and they are concerned about all institutions not just St Mary's.

6.3 The Vice Chancellor said that there was going to be consideration given to the scenario whereby undergraduate fees were reduced to £7000 as has been trailed in the press recently and modelling of the impact that this could have on the University.

- 6.4 The PVC (Academic Strategy) stated that St Mary's gave HEFCE partial assurance in the Annual Provider Review and that HEFCE were appreciative of the University's honesty in this regard.
- 6.5 The PVC (Research & Enterprise) said that she had concerns regarding the Office for Students as it will change the way degree awarding powers are given. Uncertainty currently lies around whether St Mary's RDAP application will be considered under current or new rules.
- 6.6 The Board were concerned about the student retention figures that were detailed in the Vice Chancellor's report. The Vice- Chancellor responded as follows:
- The Students Union are very helpful with providing information on attrition.
 - The University has invested heavily in order to improve retention.
 - The University need to understand why the reason for poor retention isn't known or if it is known, why it isn't acted on. Retention is more concerning than recruitment and the University needs to get to the bottom of the cause.
- 6.7 The Student Union President informed the Board that students are coming to the Union as they don't feel comfortable talking to their academics and that Program representatives aren't being used appropriately. The SU has put action plans in place with the Heads of School and are holding talks with students in order to ensure that academics are held to account.
- 6.8 The Head of Corporate Planning informed the Board that much of the data is gathered via paper based sources and only 1 out of 8 different reasons can be selected on an exit form when a multitude of factors may contribute to a student's departure. The Committee were concerned that students were not spoken to at the time of withdrawal.
- 6.9 The PVC (Academic Strategy) informed the Board that the University is currently putting in place a strategy to talk to students and hold interviews. The method for withdrawals is changing; whereas students previously went to registry and filled in a form to leave, interventions are now going to be put in place and efforts made to capture the student voice.
- 6.9 The Board questioned whether students were leaving during the 1st year exam period and if tutors could pick this up earlier. The Head of Corporate Planning stated that there are 3 peaks in student withdrawals and each seem to have different reasons (personal or academic).
- 6.10 The SU President confirmed that academic measures alone will not solve the issue of retention as there needs to be service measures in place too. For example students feel isolated during the Christmas period and this can lead to withdrawal, hence why the SU has organised events such as 'Welcome Fortnight.'
- 6.11 Professor Anne Moran stated that Learning and Development Advisors should be able to identify students who are at risk before exams and give them additional support.

(Fr Richard Finn joined the meeting)

- 6.12 The PVC (Academic Strategy) suggested to the Board that structural reform is necessary in order to scrutinise schools as they cannot report on themselves.
- 6.13 It was confirmed that a retention plan was being formulated and that a report on this would be provided to Academic Scrutiny Committee.

7 STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE

Paper 2 refers

- 7.1 The Head of Corporate Planning presented the outcomes of the Student Satisfaction Survey which had a 72% response rate thanks to the SU team rallying students to complete the survey.
- 7.2 The following points were noted:
- Overall satisfaction stayed the same, despite survey questions changing a lot.
 - The results had a positive effect on league tables.
 - Results showed that students felt valued.
 - There was variable performance at program levels.
 - Area of strength for St Mary's is the high level graduate employment rate 6 months post University, this figure has increased.
 - Based on results St Mary's is on course to achieve its Vision 2025 targets however it is the case that competitor institutions have also improved.
- 7.3 The Board asked about recent press reports regarding graduate salaries where St Mary's was reported as being one of the lowest within the sector with £12k being reported as the average salary for graduates on some drama courses.
- 7.4 The Head of Corporate Planning informed Governors that this data was self-reported with only 10 former students reporting on their income and it may not take into account earnings from other jobs worked. A more accurate source of this data could be obtained via the HMRC.
- 7.5 The Board **noted** the Strategic Plan Update.

8 STUDENT RECRUITMENT UPDATE

- 8.1 The Interim PVC (Global Engagement) presented an oral update to the Board on student recruitment numbers and thanked the staff who worked during clearing.
- 8.2 The Interim PVC (Global Engagement) told the Board that the number of acceptances were currently down on previous years and the University was still waiting for confirmation of some acceptances. Clearing was much more competitive than it had been in recent years with Russell Group institutions using clearing to recruit students meaning that students who had attained lower grades were being

recruited by Universities further up the rankings. It was the case that one prospective student who had been offered a place on a foundation degree because they had a D and an E at A-level opted to go to another University further up the rankings who offered them a place on a 3 year undergraduate degree.

- 8.3 The Interim PVC (Global Engagement) was positive about recruitment in the next academic year. A small number of programs would be looking to recruit in February 2018 and in 2018/2019 the number of single honour undergraduate courses would rise from 24 to 36.
- 8.4 The University has avoided lowering its tariff to maintain quality and to guard against a slip back down the rankings as rankings are key to future recruitment.
- 8.5 The Board were informed that other factors affected student numbers. For example the decline in Malaysian PGCE students this year is a result of the Malay Government withdrawing funding for that programme.
- 8.6 The Vice Chancellor, on behalf of the Board, thanked the Interim PVC (Global Engagement) for his hard work during clearing.
- 8.7 The Board **noted** the update from the PVC (Global Engagement).

9 FINANCIAL MATTERS

9.1 Management Accounts to 31 July 2016

Paper 3 refers

- 9.1.1 The new Director of Finance presented the Management Accounts ending July 2017. She informed the Board that the cash level was higher than expected however this was due to timing differences in projects and that after depreciation and deficit the 'actual' figure was better than budget (depreciation took out £600K).
- 9.1.2 Capital of £3m was set aside but only £2.3m was spent. The leftover capital will rollover into projects such as the student registry IT system and distance learning projects.
- 9.1.2 The Board's attention was drawn to point 7.3 of the paper with regard to variants in the School of Education and Theology. The Board wanted to know if Finance partners provide an advisory service or if they intervene when required. The Finance Director informed the Board that the Finance department wants to train and induct staff on how to manage finances.
- 9.1.3 The Finance Director was asked who is accountable for the variance; would it lie with the School or the Finance Department? The Finance Director informed the Board that both areas would be accountable.
- 9.1.4 The Board wanted to know how much room for manoeuvre St Mary's has in the 2017-2018 cash forecasts. The Finance Director informed the Board that January and April are pressure points, so the University must be careful with capital and programme spend as there is limited flexibility on cutting back costs. The Finance Director stated that the intention was to get through January without using the University's overdraft facility.

9.1.5 The Board **noted** the Management Accounts.

9.2 Approval of Fees for Post Graduate Teaching and Foundation Degrees

Paper 4 refers

9.2.1 The Board voted on the proposal to simplify the fee structure for PGT and Foundation Degree (FD) tuition fees in the 2018/19 academic year.

The vote was as follows:

In favour: 9

Against: 0

Abstentions: 1

The Board therefore **approved** the PGT/FD fee structure as detailed in paper 4.

The Head of Corporate Planning and the Finance Director withdrew from the meeting.

10 ACADEMIC MATTERS

10.1 Education Review

10.1.1 The Vice Chancellor provided the Board with an oral update on the findings of the two reviews undertaken by Professor Anne Moran and Mr Dave Hartnett on the School of Education and Theology. The VC informed the Board that it is likely that Theology will emerge as a standalone structure. Dave Hartnett stated his belief that there is a real urgency to reform the School of ETL.

10.1.3 The Vice Chancellor informed the Board that an OFSTED inspection at the School is very likely to take place in the near future. External Stakeholders have been suggesting that changes have needed to be made to the School for some time with Theology coming out of the school and school led teacher training to come under the realm of Enterprise. Both reports showed there will be some overlap in University led teacher training and the school led teacher training routes.

10.1.4 The PVC (Research and Enterprise) said that having a different structure will facilitate the school led approach.

10.1.5 The Vice Chancellor was asked how an OFSTED inspection would affect the timescale for this project. The Vice Chancellor informed the Board that they haven't considered how an inspection could affect the timings. He said that the School had the challenge of maintaining an OFSTED rating of 'Outstanding.' Professor Anne Moran stated that St Marys must maintain its OFSTED rating of or it will affect enterprise/school led route. The PVC (Academic Strategy) is to commission a mock OFSTED in near future.

10.1.6 The VC stated that the school led route needs to be developed and the Catholic Education Service wants St Marys to do more and be agile.

10.1.8 The Board **noted** the oral update provided by the Vice Chancellor.

11 STUDENTS UNION MATTERS

11.1 SMSU Report

Paper 5 refers

11.1.1 The Student Union President reported on the events happening within the Students Union.

The following points were made:

- Welcome Fortnight was well received by students.
- The SU has started an energy efficiency campaign.
- The SU strategic plan is to be completed by the SU President and interim CEO of the SU.
- Incorporation has finished and the MOU is to be drafted with a view to bringing this to the next Board meeting.

11.1.2 The Board **noted** the report from the SU President.

12 GOVERNANCE

12.1 Governors Skills Audit Outcome

Paper 6 refers

12.1.1 The Chair presented the Governors Skills Audit Outcome, on behalf of the Clerk. The Chair noted that there is a skillset gap in planning and estates, which the University should try to fill.

12.1.2 The following points were raised by the Board. The Chair of the Audit Committee, June Mulroy, commented that there is a weakness in IT, as the Audit Committee has concerns with regard to the new student IT system taking 2 years to implement. The Board needs a skill set in this area to challenge this.

12.1.3 The Board **noted** the paper prepared by the Clerk.

PART B

ITEMS FOR NOTE INCLUDING DECISIONS UNDER DELEGATED POWERS

13 REMUNERATION COMMITTEE

Paper 7 refers

The Board **noted** the minutes of the Remuneration Committee held on 21 June 2017.

13.1 Senior Pay Report Comparing St Mary's University to other UK institutions

Paper 8 refers

The Board **noted** the paper produced by the Senior Director of People.

14 FINANCE AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Paper 9 refers

The Board **noted** the minutes of the Finance and Resources Committee held on 8 September 2017.

15 AUDIT COMMITTEE

Paper 10 refers

15.1 The Chair of the Audit Committee said that further work was required to be done by the University to ensure that proper controls were in place. She said that the frameworks were there but there was insufficient accountability and processes not being put into practice.

15.2 The Board **noted** the minutes of the Audit Committee held on 12 September 2017.

16 Letter from the Company Secretary of Strawberry Hill Enterprises to the Board of Governors confirming payment of profits as Gift Aid

Paper 11 refers

The Board **noted** the letter produced by the Company Secretary.

17 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None.

18 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

9 November 2017

1 February 2018

15 February 2018 (Away Day)

26 April 2018

21 June 2018