



St Mary's
University
Twickenham
London

Board of Governors

Minutes of a meeting of the Board of Governors held on 26 April 2018 in the Waldegrave Room, St Mary' University, Twickenham.

Present:

Professor Edward Acton (*to item 10*)
Mr Conal Baxter – SU President
Professor Francis Campbell – Vice-Chancellor
Rev Richard Finn
Mr Dave Hartnett
Ms Claire McDonnell
Professor Anne Moran
Rt Rev Richard Moth (Chair)
Ms June Mulroy
Mrs Kristen Pilbrow – Staff Governor
Professor Anthony Towey – Staff Governor

In attendance:

Ms Vanessa Beever – Deputy Head of School of Management & Social Sciences (*to item 10*)
Mrs Elizabeth Bell – Head of Corporate Planning
Professor John Brewer – Pro Vice-Chancellor (Global Engagement)
Mr Andrew Browning – Clerk to the Board of Governors and Company Secretary (Minute taker)
Professor John Charmley – Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic Strategy)
Dr Adam Longcroft – Dean of Learning & Teaching (*to item 6*)
Mr John Unsworth – Chief Operating Officer

The meeting commenced with a prayer by the Chair.

1. WELCOMES AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies: Mr Jeff Cottle, Noreen Doyle, Sue Handley-Jones, Mrs Jo Blunden, Rt Hon Ruth Kelly

The Chair welcomed Dr Adam Longcroft the new Dean of Learning and Teaching to the University.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair declared an interest in St John's Seminary Womersley in relation to matters regarding the ecclesiastical faculty.

The SU President declared an interest as President of the Students' Union in relation to the Memorandum of Understanding being discussed under 13.1 of the Agenda.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting that took place on 21 March 2018 were approved by the Board.

4. MATTERS ARISING

In relation to M5.23 the Board were informed that Academic Board will be considering departmental structures within faculties when it meets on 2 May 2018.

5. PRESENTATION ON OFFICE FOR STUDENTS

- 5.1 The presentation was made by the Dean of Learning and Teaching with a supporting paper by the Head of Corporate Planning. The Board were informed that the Office for Students had replaced HEFCE. The role of the OFS was to protect the rights of students and unlike the previous HEFCE regime it was not there to protect or act as an intermediary for HEI's. There was an emphasis on compliance and accountability of HEIs against "lead indicators" and their meeting the conditions of registration. Failure to meet the conditions of registration would potentially lead to increased monitoring, financial penalties and de-registration. The Dean of Learning and Teaching also outlined the regulatory framework of the OFS to the Board.
- 5.2 The Head of Corporate Planning said that work was being done on the registration process. She said that the Chairs of Finance and Resources Committee, Academic Scrutiny Committee, and the Chairman of the Board would all be asked to provide feedback on the registration documents that were going to be submitted. These would be sent around 13/14 May.
- 5.3 It was asked by the Board how the philosophy of the OFS differed from that of HEFCE. The Dean of Learning and Teaching said that HEFCE saw students as part of the Higher Education Process along with the HEIs whereas in contrast the OFS sees students as consumers.
- 5.4 The Board asked where Universities would go for assistance as the OFS does not provide the same assistance that HEFCE did. The Dean of Learning & Teaching said that Advance HE may provide some support but there was now a move to a competitive environment which may even stop collaboration between Universities in some cases. The Vice-Chancellor said that were a University get into difficulties there

would be no loan or similar support as there had been under the HEFCE regime. The Head of the OFS comes from a consumer background indicating that there had been a cultural shift. The Head of Corporate Planning said that the change in policy meant that it was likely to be new entrants and exits from the higher education market.

- 5.5 The SU President said that it was ironic that the fines that could be imposed on Universities would be paid out of student fees. He said that in his view the creation of the OFS was a reaction to the government raising fees and had not been something that was asked for by students. He said that he was concerned that its creation meant that the government missed what Higher Education was supposed to be about.
- 5.6 It was asked how closely spending within the University would be tracked by the OFS. The Dean of Learning & Teaching said that the OFS would be unlikely to micro-manage but would be looking at the metrics and outcomes. The COO said that the University would continue to send TRAC and HESA returns to the OFS.
- 5.7 The Chair thanked the Dean of Learning and Teaching for his presentation. He said that it raised a number of challenges for the University in particular how it will deal with the student being considered a consumer and potential new fee structures that may be imposed. He said that it raised several important questions about what the purpose of the University should be particularly in relation to the development of its academics and its research. He said that he was concerned that this was a sign of a shift away from the Nolan Principles.

(The Dean of Learning and Teaching left the meeting)

6. VICE CHANCELLOR'S REPORT

Paper 1 refers

- 6.1 This was presented by the Vice Chancellor. The written report covered the following areas:-
- i) The transition process from HEFCE to OFS and the Assurance Review that is taking place on 4 July 2018.
 - ii) The current process that is being undertaken at the University to deliver efficiencies.
 - iii) Academic Board report.
 - iv) The occupation by the University of 60 Waldegrave Road.
 - v) The University's International Strategy.
 - vi) KPI update on the improvement of the University's SSR.
 - vii) The senior appointments of Dr Symeon Dagkas as the new Dean of SHAS and Dr Adam Longcroft as Dean of Teaching and Learning.

- 6.2 The Vice Chancellor informed the Board that the RDAP application has been submitted together with its supporting documentation. Edward Acton and Anne Moran had been amongst those who had provided input to the application.
- 6.3 As a further update on the KPIs since the Vice Chancellor's report had been distributed, the University had gone up 16 places to 104th in the Complete University Guide. The Director of Corporate Planning said that there had been an improvement in rank for the University in five of the indicators (student satisfaction, graduate prospect, staff/student ratio, facilities spend, and good honours) and a decrease in rank in the five other indicators (entry standards, research assessment quality, research assessment intensity, academic services spend, and degree completion) the rank decreases were however on a smaller scale meaning that overall the University had risen in the league table. The University had risen from being 18th in London from 21st last year. It was however the case that other Universities within St Mary's competitor group had improved.
- 6.4 The Board were informed that the First Star Programme had won an award at the "Whatuni" Awards in the Best Prospective Student Engagement category.
- 6.5 The OFSTED inspection is starting on 30 April.
- 6.6 An update was given to the Board by the Dave Hartnett regarding the proposed Ecclesiastical Faculty. He told the Board the relationship between the a new faculty and the current department of theology would still need to be worked out. It was also the case that no public money could be spent on the faculty. There was a need for more of a project plan to be prepared and a task list was currently being drawn up. There will also be discussion with various stakeholders. It was asked how this would be communicated to staff, Dave Hartnett said that it would be a few weeks at least before an outline of how the faculty would work would be produced.

7. KPI UPDATE

Paper 2 refers

- 7.1 This was presented by the Director of Corporate Planning. She informed the Board that much of the information that was contained within the paper had already been provided to the Board at the Away Day in February.
- 7.2 In relation to the student satisfaction ranking on the CUG league table, the Board asked how this ranking was calculated. The Director of Corporate Planning said that this was based on the NSS.
- 7.3 The Board were asked to approve the targets contained within the paper. The Board voted as follows:-

In favour: **10 votes**

Against: **0 votes**

Abstentions: **1 vote**

The Board therefore **approved** the KPI Targets as set out within the paper.

7. STUDENT RECRUITMENT UPDATE

Paper 3 refers

- 7.1 This was presented by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Global Engagement). He said that the number of applicants for places at the University had dropped by 6% compared to the same period in 2017. The focus was therefore now on converting the applicants for places into acceptances of offers and the University was currently 4% up on 2017 in terms of the number of offers that had been accepted.
- 7.2 The PVC (Global Engagement) said that it was the UCAS “decline by default” deadline next week and it was hoped that there would be a number of last minute acceptances. The University was sending out emails, texts, postcards, and making phone calls to those potential students in its efforts to persuade them to accept offers of places.
- 7.3 The Board were told that there had been an increase in the number of postgraduate applications. The University has been holding regular drop-in evenings and had also been seeking to get the message out to alumni that they qualified for a 10% discount on fees.
- 7.4 The PVC (Global Engagement) said that there had been the first meeting of the Clearing Working Group. He said that the group was showing plenty of energy, enthusiasm and had developed a series of action plans.
- 7.5 The Board were informed that the bursary scholarships had been refined. The Vice Chancellor’s Excellence Award (£3k per annum) was available for students who are predicted to get an ABB at A-level and there was also the St Mary’s Bursary (£2k per annum) for students who come from families who have an income of less the £15k. There have been 23 applications for the Vice Chancellor’s Award and 12 for the St Mary’s Bursary. It is hoped that conditional offers would be made over the next few weeks and that the bursaries would give high achieving prospective students an incentive to come to the University.
- 7.6 The Board asked how the University was using social media in what was going to be an aggressive clearing process. The PVC (Global Engagement) said that there were two audiences to appeal to in clearing; those students who had held back on accepting a place in the hope that they would get a place through clearing once they knew their results and those who had not got the grades that they had hoped for and had ended up in clearing. Social media was important to ensure that both of these groups were reached out to in the clearing process. It was also the case that the costs of running social media campaigns were lower than other methods.
- 7.7 The SU President said that he was on the clearing working group and he felt that the University communicated well with prospective students and was ahead of many other institutions.

8 RETENTION

Paper 4 refers

- 8.1 This was presented by the Deputy Head of School of Management and Social Sciences who is the lead on the Retention Action Group. She told the Board that a lot of work relating to retention was already happening at the University; however, the group was seeking to increase the efforts to improve retention and for there to be more work across various functions of the University.
- 8.2 The Deputy Head of School said that there were two key ongoing projects; the first was in relation to staff training and the second was in relation to taking measures to reduce withdrawals by students due to academic failure.
- 8.3 The PVC (Academic Strategy) told the Board that the Centre for Teaching Excellence and Student Success ("TESS") was currently working with the programmes that had the poorest retention rates. He said that there was a model to improve retention that the University needed to roll out so that good practices were embedded throughout the institution.
- 8.4 The PVC (Academic Strategy) said that the student attrition rates increased after each exam period. He said that the Heads of Schools had therefore put together a residential programme for students who had to do resits which was designed to get them through their exams.
- 8.5 The Board were told by the PVC (Academic Strategy) that in the longer term TESS would triage courses with low attrition rates and make medium term recommendations as to how to improve these. Efforts were also being made for timetables to be produced earlier than before.
- 8.6 The Board noted that some course seemed to be performing far worse than others. The Deputy Head of School said that there was a particular problem with joint honours programmes and that there had been some difficulties in making two programmes within different schools to fit together in a coherent fashion.
- 8.7 The Board noted that PSE had not improved its retention figures still being at around 18%. The Vice-Chancellor said that the significant improvements in Sports Rehabilitation and Nutrition Course had shown that there was not a systemic problem and he hoped that moving PSE to SHAS would help improve their figures.
- 8.8 The Deputy Head of School said that in the past there had not been enough of a focus on commuter students. The University would therefore be looking to make changes to induction to try and appeal to those students.
- 8.9 The Board thanked the Deputy Head of School and were pleased that the action group was starting to have an impact and understood that it would take time for the retention rates to improve.

9. MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS

Paper 5 refers

- 9.1 This was presented by the Chief Operating Officer (“COO”). The Board were told that the University was £5m behind its forecast income and the operating loss for the year was currently expected to be £2.5m. Staff costs were still running at above 70%.
- 9.2 The Board were told that the cash balance at 31 March was £3.7m and that it was expected that in April this would fall to below £3m with the cash position improving May following the receipt of SLC monies. In January 2019 the University was forecast to have an overdraft of £1.5m which will bring the University extremely close to its current overdraft limit of £2m. The COO said that he was meeting with HSBC next week to discuss the renewal of the University’s overdraft.
- 9.3 The Board asked what contact there had been with HEFCE. The Vice Chancellor said that aside from the Assurance Review that was taking place in July no further meetings had been arranged. He said that the move to the OFS regime meant that there was no longer an institutional contact point within the OFS as there had been in HEFCE and that future analysis of the University’s data would be carried out remotely.
- 9.4 The Board asked about whether any further contingency plans had been prepared. The COO said that a £1m contingency was being considered and that this would be brought before the Finance and Resources Committee.
- 9.5 The Vice-Chancellor said that disposal of assets would not ultimately show the University to be financially sustainable and it was necessary for the University to show strong fiscal discipline. If the University did not do this then the OFS would question whether the University was financially sustainable. The Vice-Chancellor said that there needed to be a move away from an unhealthy reliance on one stream of income and the University should be looking at multiple streams including postgraduate and international students, and Enterprise.
- 9.6 The Board asked if there was a need for Internal Audit to play a role in reviewing the financial performance of the University. June Mulroy, the Chair of the Audit Committee, said that the Internal Audit Plan for 2018/2019 was currently being prepared and something could be included in this.
- 9.7 The Board discussed the need for it to look at the strategic horizon and for consideration of various future scenarios for the University taking into account the changing nature of the HE sector. It was suggested that there should be another Governors’ Day to discuss this and that Edward Acton may be able set some questions for discussion. The Clerk was asked to arrange this day hopefully at some point in September.

(Edward Acton left the meeting)

(The Deputy Head of School of Management & Social Sciences left the meeting)

10. PLANNING ROUND UPDATE

Paper 6 refers

- 10.1 This was presented by the Head of Corporate Planning and the Finance Director. The Board were told that each area within the University was asked to put together a case for change. The case would outline the strategic objectives for the department and these would be linked to Vision 2025. The plans would also assess the impacts of the proposals and highlight the key risks. Planning meetings were held for each department where their plans would be open to scrutiny and challenge.
- 10.2 The Board were informed that Table 1 of the paper detailing the savings targets and the savings achieved under the Case for Change was now out of date. It was now the case that all of the savings targets had been met.
- 10.3 The Board commented that it was good to use the challenge function and that it seemed to be a constructive process. The notes of the planning meetings contained within the paper was also helpful.
- 10.4 Board members questioned whether there had been as much consultation with staff on the cases for change as there could have been. The COO said that the changes that were proposed were being made in the context of the need to make savings and they were therefore proposed in this context. They are also management processes which include management KPIs.
- 10.5 The Board asked what follow-up there would be to ensure that the changes were being implemented. The Head of Corporate Planning said that this was a work in progress but it would be a case of going back to the owners to ensure that the actions were being completed. There would also be regular reports back to SMT.

11. STUDENTS UNION REPORT

Paper 7 refers

- 11.1 This was presented by the SU President. He told the Board that the election of new officers had taken place in March and that there would be three new sabbatical officers in 2018/2019. They are:-
- Natalie Hobkirk – SU President
- Aly Hughes – Vice President Activities
- Dan Barnes – Vice President Community and Welfare.
- 11.2 The Board were told that there was currently good engagement by students with sports and societies. The Board were also told of the University's success in the West London Varsity where the University beat Brunel.
- 11.3 The interim Chief Executive Officer, Andy Morwood, has gone back to Westminster Students' Union and Donna Smith has now returned from maternity to resume the role.
- 11.4 The Board were told that the SU provided independent advice to students on welfare issues. This advice was given primarily by the SU President. 40 students had sought

advice however the SU only had the capacity to deal with 11 of the most serious cases. The Board expressed its concern about this and there needs to be consideration by the University as to how best to cope with this.

12 MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING WITH THE STUDENTS' UNION

Paper 8 refers

12.1 This was presented by the Clerk. He informed the Board that a Memorandum of Understanding had been drafted between the University and the SU in order to provide clarity to the relationship between the two bodies. The MOU had initially been drafted by the Clerk and amended following consultation with SLT members, governors and the SU. The SU President confirmed that the trustees of the SU had approved the signing of the MOU by him on behalf of the SU.

12.2 The SU President and the Vice Chancellor both stated that they wished to abstain from voting on the basis that they would be signing the document on behalf of the two parties if it was approved. The Board voted on whether to authorise the Vice Chancellor to sign the MOU on behalf of the University the vote was as follows:-

In favour: 8

Against: 0

Abstentions: 2

The Board therefore **approved** the signing of the MOU by the Vice Chancellor on behalf of the University.

13 STAFF SURVEY UPDATE

Paper 9 refers

13.1 This was presented by the PVC (Global Engagement). The Staff Survey had shown an overall drop in staff satisfaction since the last survey was conducted in 2014. The PVC (AS) said that it was the case that the survey had been open when announcements had been made to University staff regarding the need for restructuring. This announcement had taken place two weeks into the survey being conducted.

13.2 The Board's attention was drawn to the steps that were being taken in response to the survey. The University would be running focus groups to get more detail of the concerns that staff may have following this there would be further analysis of the focus group and action plans to approve the situation would be agreed. There would also be regular "pulse" surveys to gauge staff satisfaction in the future.

13.3 The Board asked if it was possible to see what the responses were like before and after the change announcement was made. The PVC (Global Engagement) said that he did not believe that this would be possible.

13.4 The Board expressed its concern that there was only a 66% response rate. The PVC (Global Engagement) said that this did need to be improved in the next staff survey.

14. FINANCE AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Paper 10 refers

The Board noted the minutes of the Finance and Resources Committee meeting held on 5 March 2018.

15 AUDIT COMMITTEE

Paper 11 refers

- 15.1 The Chair of the Audit Committee informed the Board that some areas within the University were slower than others to respond to the actions recommended by the internal auditors. She said that in some areas the pace of change was slow and there were cases of suggested improvements not being accepted.

- 15.2 The Board noted the minutes of the Audit Committee meeting held on 13 March 2018.

16 ACADEMIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Paper 12 refers

The Board noted the minutes of the Academic Scrutiny Committee held on 22 March 2018.

17 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 17.1 All Board members had been given a letter from the Campus Trade Unions expressing opposition to the cuts and staff reductions that were being made as a consequence of the restructuring process.

- 17.2 The PVC (Academic Strategy) said that voluntary redundancy was currently being offered to staff who were potentially at risk. The University had also sought to sequence job vacancies so that only those at risk could only apply for those jobs unless there were exceptional circumstances. The University had also committed to extend any trials periods of alternative roles.

- 17.3 The Vice Chancellor said that it had been a difficult time. The entire sector was changing and there needed to be a change of culture in the University which had not occurred previously. He said that throughout the consultation period the University has listened and had made changes where practicable. At the end of the process the University would still have staff costs amounting to 63% of turnover which would still be high for the sector. He said that it was not an easy time and all he could promise to do was to try and ensure that the university mitigates the effect on staff as much as possible and be consistently transparent.

- 17.4 The Board agreed that the Chair of the Finance and Resources Committee should respond to the letter. It was intended that his response would be sent out by the end of the following week and that in the meantime the Clerk would send an email to the union representatives acknowledging receipt.

END