



BOARD OF GOVERNORS

MINUTES OF MEETING

Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Governors held on Thursday 16 May 2019 at 5pm in the Senior Common Room, St Marys University, Twickenham.

Present

Professor Edward Acton
Professor Francis Campbell – Vice Chancellor
Mr Dave Hartnett
Ms Natalie Hobkirk – SU President
Professor Anne Moran
Rt Reverend Richard Moth (Chair)
Mrs June Mulroy
Mrs Kristen Pilbrow – Staff Governor

In Attendance

Mrs Joanne Blunden – Senior Director of People
Mr Andrew Boggs – Interim Director of Strategic Planning
Mr Paul Bridge – PVC (Global Engagement)
Mr David Brambell - Observer
Mr Andrew Browning – Clerk to the Board and Company Secretary (Minutes)
Professor John Charmley – PVC (Academic Strategy)
Rt Hon Ruth Kelly – PVC (Research & Enterprise)
Mr John Unsworth – Chief Operating Officer

PART A

MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

BoG 56/18 WELCOMES AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Paul Bridge the PVC (Global Engagement) was welcomed to his first meeting of the Board.

David Brambell who is a potential new member of the Board was welcomed to the meeting as an observer.

Apologies for absence had been received from Noreen Doyle, Claire McDonnell, and Fr Richard Finn

BoG 57/18 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Vice-Chancellor confirmed that he had accepted a new position at an Australian Higher Education Institute which he was starting in January 2020.

The Chair declared that he was a trustee at St John's Seminary in Wonnersh.

BoG 58/18 CHAIR'S BUSINESS

This was to be the last Board meeting of the Chief Operating Officer, John Unsworth. He has been at the University for two periods between 2016 and 2019. He was thanked for his hard work and integrity while at the University. In thanks for his services he was presented with the St Mary's Medal.

BoG 59/18 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2019 were **approved** by the Board.

BoG 60/18 MATTERS ARISING

51/18 – The Modern Slavery Statement has been uploaded onto the University's website.

52/18 – An update on the attendance monitoring system was given to academic scrutiny committee on 19 March. The PVC (Academic Strategy) said that there had not been a significant improvement in usage of the system. There was in his view a cultural problem in getting students to tap in. Teaching had now largely finished for this academic year and it was a priority for next year to encourage students to use the system.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION OR APPROVAL

BoG 61/18 VICE-CHANCELLOR'S REPORT

Paper 1 refers

This was presented by the Vice Chancellor. The Vice Chancellor highlighted to the Board that a letter had been received by the Office for Students ("OFS") which had been sent to all HEIs regarding financial sustainability and the need for their financial forecasts to be accurate. He said that the recent announcement that the teaching grant was being reduced was not helpful to the University's financial planning.

The Vice-Chancellor said that the OFS was continuing to raise its profile and it was the case that a majority of institutions within the sector were currently subject to some form of enhanced monitoring. Responsibility for ensuring compliance with the regulatory regime has shifted to governing bodies.

The Board were informed of the progress in setting up the Mater Ecclesiae College ("MEC"). The items on the action tracker were progressing and the necessary

documentation has now been sent to Rome for approval. The Board was likely to be receiving documentation relating to the MEC over the next few months for its consideration and approval. The budget had now been agreed and it is modelled on the delivery of the course at a single London location.

BoG 62/18 VICE-CHANCELLOR RECRUITMENT

Paper 2 refers

The Chair informed the Board that he had asked Professor Acton lead the process for recruiting the new Vice-Chancellor on behalf of the governing body. Currently the University was in the process of preparing a job description and would be looking to appoint an Executive Search firm to assist in identifying potential candidates and advise on the process. It was a difficult time to be searching in that a number of UK universities were currently searching for Vice-Chancellors and the requirement that the successful candidate be of the catholic faith also added to the difficulty of the search.

Professor Acton said that this was obviously a critical appointment and that the Board needed to own the process. He said that the successful candidate could come from any of a wide range of backgrounds. It was envisaged that it would be a two stage selection process with the first interviews being carried out with a panel drawn from the Board and the second stage involving students and staff as well as Board members.

The issue of the salary was raised by the Board. The salary of the current Vice-Chancellor was lower than most other HEIs and this may potentially have an effect on the ability of the University to recruit. The Senior Director of people said that benchmarking data could be obtained to assist with this.

The Chair said that Professor Acton would be stepping down from the Board at the end of the academic year but would be assisting with the recruitment process. He said that given the timeframes it was likely that an interim appointment would be needed between the current Vice-Chancellor leaving in January and the new person starting.

BoG 63/18 KPI UPDATE

Paper 3 refers

This was presented by the Interim Director of Strategic Planning. He told the Board that since the paper had been distributed there had been updated figures for retention which had shown an improvement across all years. A more detailed report on this would be provided to the Academic Scrutiny Committee.

The Board's attention was drawn to the staff student ratios (SSR) which has an effect on the league table performance. For 2017/2018 the ratio was 16 which was an increase of 0.3 from 2016/2017. Compared to the University's competitor group St Mary's was doing slightly better. It was however the case that 2017/2018 figures had not captured the impact of "Case for Change".

In relation to the National Student Survey the final response rate was 74.3% representing a slight increase over 2018. The PVC (Academic Strategy) said that the University was still vulnerable when it came to the NSS but work was being done with

the SU to ensure that the student experience was good and the workload model was being used to make improvements in teaching. The PVC (Academic Strategy) said that most of the improvements that would have a quick impact on the University's place in the rankings had in the most part been made. He said however that the creation of faculties would have a beneficial effect on the rankings in the longer term.

The Board asked about the Augar Review of Higher Education Funding and asked whether if it was implemented there would be compensation from elsewhere for the reduction in fees. The Interim Director of Strategic Planning said that there may be some recreation of the teaching grant; however, the government would not be wanting to create additional public expenditure.

Within the paper was an analysis of the University's performance in the Complete University Guide ("CUG") league table. The University had risen in the CUG league table by 7 places from 104 to 97.

The Board noted that within the CUG league table the University had dropped 27 points in the graduate prospects metric. The Interim Director of Strategic Planning said that it had actually used the same data as the previous year but there appeared to have been some modification of the weighting in relation to graduate employment. The PVC (Research & Enterprise) said that the Employability Strategy was coming before the next Academic Scrutiny Committee and measures were being embedded across the University. She said that the unemployment rate of graduates had increases in line with the rest of London.

BoG 64/18 STUDENT RECRUITMENT UPDATE

Paper 4 refers

This was presented by the PVC (Global Engagement). He said that it was difficult to tell how well the University was currently doing in terms of recruitment. He said that the market was currently flat but that competitor institutions appeared to be hurting more than St Mary's. Applications had been slightly up on the previous year (1.8%) with year 1 acceptances being 56 behind on last year and foundation acceptance being 171 ahead of last year.

The risk for the University was conversion of the acceptances into new students starting at the University in September and in particular those who had accepted places on Foundation Courses. It was unclear how many international and EU applicants would convert. The PVC (Global Engagement) said that a lot of work would need to be done in clearing.

The PVC (Global Engagement) said that PGT Courses were at around the same point as last year. He said that efforts were being made to persuade current final year students to do PGCE or PGT courses. PGCE was slightly down however this was the same throughout the sector and the University was not doing as badly as other institutions.

The Board were told that the CRM system was making it a lot easier to engage with potential students. A review of advertising spend was currently being undertaken and it was expected that there would be more spending on digital advertising rather than physical adverts. The University was trying to get more people to register an interest in the University for the purposes of clearing.

The Board asked what effect the provision of accommodation has on recruitment. The PVC (Global Engagement) said that there was potentially an opportunity to do things differently with accommodation which would make the University more attractive such as changing the deposit process and consideration being given to having postgraduate-only accommodation or floors.

The Board noted that there had been a positive increase in the number of international applications and asked what was being done to convert the applications into students. Kristen Pilbrow said that having people who were CAS trained helped with assisting with the applications. Partnerships with other institutions in other countries also assisted with conversion figures.

The Board asked how active the University was in recruiting from Catholic schools and colleges. The PVC (Global Engagement) said that not enough was currently being done and agreed with the Board that this should be explored.

BoG 65/18 MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS

Paper 5 refers

The management accounts to 31 March were presented by the Finance Director. He told the Board that the EBITDA was relatively good at £4.8m which was approximately £1.4m ahead of budget. The Finance Director said that the University was tracking close to the forecast with a projected loss of around £741k. This included the £400k cost contingency which if unused would bring the University very close to breaking even.

The Board were reminded by the Finance Director that cash pressures were a particular concern for the University last year; however, the cash position of the University was £1.7m better than expected and the University was now not expected to use its overdraft facility.

The Finance Director said that the University had performed well in terms of its expenditure but that its revenue was worse than hoped.

The Board noted the accounts and said that it had been a terrific achievement to get the University's finances to this position and it was hoped that this would give a favourable picture of the University to the OFS.

The management accounts were **noted** by the Board.

BoG 66/18 PLANNING ROUND UPDATE

Paper 6 refers

This was presented by the Finance Director. He told the Board that that planning round was still in progress. The University previously forecast an EBITDA for 2019/2020 of £2,900k however following the meetings with all departments there had been a need to reduce optimism in some areas and there was currently a £600k gap that needed to be filled to meet this forecast figure. It was however still the University's intention to meet this target.

The Board agreed that the University should stick to the target of £2,900k and asked whether a further 1% saving could be made across all departments. The Vice-

Chancellor said that the Senior Leadership Team were unanimous in the view that the target should be met. He said that some areas of the University were still dealing with the cuts of the previous year and that a further 1% on top of the 3% savings they had already been asked to make for 2019/2020 would put undue strain on some areas. He said that the preference was therefore to look intelligently where additional savings in specific areas could be made to fill the current £600k shortfall.

The Board asked about the financial expectations of The Exchange. The Finance Director said that it was currently not expected to break even. There was currently an evaluation being undertaken regarding whether to continue with the lease or to invoke the break clause. The general view of SMT and the University Operating Board was that it should continue.

The PVC (Research & Enterprise) said that a paper was shortly going to be put before the Finance and Resources Committee regarding the renewal of the lease. This paper would set out the options for its future operations. She said that footfall had been higher than forecast; however, other costs such as security had also been higher than expected.

The planning round update was **noted** by the Board and the full budget and financial forecasts would be coming to the Board for approval at its next meeting.

BoG 67/18 GOVERNANCE UPDATE

Paper 7

This was presented by the Clerk and provided an update on the work that had been done to date in respect of improving governance within the University. The paper was **noted** by the Board.

BoG 68/18 REF CODE OF PRACTICE

The PVC (Research & Enterprise) told the Board that the REF Code of Practice sets out the criteria upon which staff members can be submitted for REF. The draft has been consulted upon with staff members and it had been shared with members of the Academic Scrutiny Committee.

It was proposed that the approval of the Code of Practice be delegated to the Academic Scrutiny Committee. The Board did not however feel that it should not have sight of the final version before it was submitted. The following timetable was therefore proposed:-

22 May 2019 – The draft Code of Practice shall be reviewed by the Academic Scrutiny Committee who shall propose any changes.

28 May 2019 – The amended version of the Code be distributed to all Board members with their being asked to confirm their approval by 31 May 2019. – **ACTION**

BoG 69/18 STUDENTS UNION REPORT

Paper 9 refers

This was presented by the SU President. She told the Board that elections had taken place with more candidates standing than previous. The job roles of the sabbaticals had now changed and details of these could be found in the paper. The new CEO of the Students' Union has started in her role. The Union AGM had taken place that week and there had been a good attendance.

The Board **noted** the report of the Students Union.

BoG 70/18 FINANCE AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Paper 10 refers

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 March 2019 were **noted** by the Board.

BoG 71/18 AUDIT COMMITTEE

Paper 11 refers

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 March 2019 were **noted** by the Board.

BoG 72/18 ACADEMIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Paper 12 refers

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2019 were **noted** by the Board.

BoG 73/18 CORRESPONDENCE FROM OFS – PREVENT MONITORING RISK ASSESSMENT OUTCOME

Paper 13 refers

The correspondence from the OFS containing the “Prevent” monitoring risk assessment stated that the University was not at higher risk. This was **noted** by the Board.

BoG 74/18 GOVERNORS ATTENDANCE REGISTER

Paper 14 refers

The Governors attendance register was **noted** by the Board.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

BoG 75/18 GRADUATIONS

The Board was reminded that graduations are taking place on 17 and 18 July.

BoG 76/18 DATES OF NEXT MEETING

25 June 2019

END