



St Mary's
University
Twickenham
London

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

A meeting of the Board of Governors held on Wednesday 1 July at 5pm. The meeting was held via Zoom.

PRESENT

Mr David Brambell
Dr Christine Campbell – Staff Governor
Mr Charlie Canning – Student Life President
Ms Noreen Doyle
Fr Richard Finn
Mr Dave Hartnett
Mr Anthony McClaran – Vice Chancellor
Ms Claire McDonnell
Professor Anne Moran
Rt Rev Richard Moth (Chair)
Ms June Mulroy
Mr Pietro Palladino
Mrs Kristen Pilbrow – Staff Governor
Mr John Unsworth

IN ATTENDANCE

Mrs Elizabeth Bell – Director of Strategic Planning
Mrs Jo Blunden – Chief Operating Officer
Ms Claire Brookes – Director of Recruitment (Item 9 only)
Mr Andrew Browning – Clerk to the Board and Legal Counsel (minutes)
Mr John Charmley – Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic Strategy)
Mrs Josephine Ip – Interim Head of Business
Mr Richard Solomon – Chief Financial Officer

MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

87/19 WELCOMES AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Charlie Canning who is the new Student Life President was welcomed as a member of the Board.

Josephine Ip, the Interim Head of Business, and Claire Brookes, the Director of Recruitment, were both welcomed to their first meeting of the Board of Governors.

Apologies for absence had been received from the PVC (Enterprise) and the PVC (Global Engagement).

88/19 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

89/19 CHAIR'S BUSINESS

The Chair expressed his thanks to the University community for its hard work during what had been a very difficult time for all during the Coronavirus pandemic.

90/19 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting of 14 May 2020 were approved by the Board.

91/19 MATTERS ARISING

76/19 – Loan from Barclays. The Chief Financial Officer (“CFO”) told the Board that Barclays have agreed in principle to lend the University £4m. It is a 5-year unsecured medium-term loan and is a standard Barclays product rather than a government backed coronavirus loan. The most meaningful covenant of the loan was that operating profits would need to be 100% or more of the debt and service costs in year 1, rising to 150% in year 2 and 175% in years 3, 4, and 5. Board approval will be required for the loan once the terms were agreed with approval being preferable by the end of the financial year. As a consequence an additional meeting of the Board may be required if approval cannot be by written resolution.

80/19 – Graduations – The Chief Operating Officer (“COO”) said that work was being done on a virtual graduation and the Students’ Union was being involved in the organisation of this. The government guidance on large gatherings in the future was still not clear and a decision as to whether to hold graduations in November would be made at the end of July or the beginning of August.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION OR APPROVAL

92/19 VICE-CHANCELLOR'S REPORT

Paper 1 refers

The Vice-Chancellor told the Board that there had been a lot of activity on strategic planning and thanked the Board members who sit on the joint Board/SLT strategy working group for their assistance with this. It was expected that the work of the group would be shared with the Board over the coming months including at the Away Day in October.

The issues that have been raised by the “Black Lives Matter” movement is covered by a separate paper and it is an issue that has occupied a lot of SLT time and warrants careful consideration.

The Vice-Chancellor said that Universities were being put in a difficult position. The government positioning on higher education is that universities are standalone bodies which

make their own decisions based on public health advice. The OfS however is seeking to impose as yet unconfirmed new conditions of registration for providers and has indicated that it will take retrospective punitive action against providers who do not adhere to these. There had been consultation on the new conditions of registration and there has been considerable opposition within the sector to any retrospective application of these as arguably this would be unlawful.

The University is still vigorously pursuing the issue of RDAP and has made some headway through good engaged dialogue with the OfS and the DfE. It has become clear the degree awarding powers issue has been a problem for other providers as well as St Mary's with GuildHE now lobbying on behalf of the University and other institutions in a similar position. It was unlikely that there would be any outcome over the next few weeks. DfE and the OfS will be looking over the University's financial plans and admissions and the University was trying to engage positively with them to get a timetable for approval.

The Board asked about press coverage of potential lockdowns in Richmond and Hounslow. The Vice-Chancellor said that he and the COO had discussed these reports; however, the actual situation did not appear to be as serious as it had been portrayed. The COO said that the Richmond Council twitter feed had rebutted the news reports saying that there had only been two cases of Covid-19 in the last 7 days. The government data on the Borough had shown the number of cases to be low and it was felt that the news reports were exaggerated. It was therefore hoped that there would be no further restrictions in the Borough.

The Board asked what positive outcomes there had been from the Vice-Chancellor's meeting with various stakeholders. The Vice Chancellor said that the University had developed a good relationship with Royal Holloway regarding recruiting students to do PGCE at St Mary's. He said that on the broader Catholic mission front there was a wish to develop links with the University and other Catholic institutions which were interested in the breadth of its offering from mainstream degrees to the ecclesiastical degrees being offered through the MEC. There had been great interest shown by partners and potential partners during lockdown in accessing the University's theological provision online particularly through short courses. The University was also moving forward with its due diligence of UTC and efforts to open the campus at the Gillis Centre.

The Board **noted** the Vice-Chancellor's report.

93/19 STRATEGY WORKING GROUP UPDATE

Paper 2 refers

The Vice-Chancellor told the Board that so far the meetings of the Strategy Working Group had given a space for all involved to think creatively about the issues listed in the paper and these would eventually be brought back to the Board for discussion at the Away Day in October. These issues had also been linked into the more urgent developments regarding financial strategy and it was also creating an opportunity to have a re-examination of the University's diversity and inclusion policies and strategies.

The Vice-Chancellor said that it was becoming clear that the government's policy for post-18 education would focus on Further Education and that a paper on Further Education would be considered by the Strategy Working Group. It was also thought that the government would focus on employability and outcomes for those studying for which the University had a good story to tell; however, the University's relationship and engagement with Further Education generally needed more consideration.

The Board asked about the University's digital strategy and whether discussions would centre around online learning or be broader covering all aspects of the digital arena that the University engages in such as marketing etc. The Vice-Chancellor said that there would be more of a focus on the University's online provision and digital process improvement. He said that a serious discussion needed to be had around the University's approach to communication and marketing as currently the main source of communication with students and staff was through digital means.

The Board **noted** the Strategy Working Group Update.

94/19 KPI UPDATE – COMPLETE UNIVERSITY GUIDE

Paper 3 refers

The Director of Strategic Planning said that there had been a 10 place drop in the Complete University Guide which was not entirely unexpected. The University had dropped in all of its metrics with the exception of degree completion which had slightly improved reflecting the work that had been done in student retention. The areas where there had been the largest drops were in the NSS, the staff student ratio, and entry tariff.

The University had done exceptionally well in the NSS in the previous year and arguably the drop had been more a case of the University reverting to its usual position. The increased staff/student ratio had not been unexpected due to the effects of Case for Change. The fall in the entry tariff had been a consequence of the "hydraulic effect" of University's higher up the league tables recruiting more higher tariff students and these being replaced at St Mary's with lower tariff students.

The Director of Strategic Planning said that the next NSS results were due this month so it would be interesting to see where the University was following their publication. She said that the University looked to maximise its return for staff/student ratios but there was not much more that could be done in this regard. The University would look to maintain the levels of students getting good honours while remaining aware that grade inflation was a political issue.

New data for graduate prospects has just been published and was due to be considered by SMT. This had been very positive with St Mary's graduates having among the lowest unemployment rates in the country.

The next round of league tables will be published in the autumn. These were unlikely to be different from the current set and SMT will be considering its league table strategy for the coming year and how to reverse the recent fall.

The Board asked why there had been a drop in Sports Science. The Director of Strategic Planning said that the main reason for this was the NSS outcome.

The Board asked about the staff/student ratio and what could be done to improve this. The Director of Strategic Planning said that this was difficult. The University had tried to return as many staff as it could for this purpose; however, case for change had meant that there were only so many staff that could be counted.

The Board asked about how best to communicate to prospective students, and their parents, about how the overall result of the league table does not capture all of the positive work that takes place at the University such as Education being OFSTED "outstanding". It was told

that a lot of work was done on the ground at open days and similar events to take prospective students through the league tables and highlight where they do not show the positive aspects of the University or where some aspects of the league table such as research performance may not be of particular relevance to a prospective student. The Vice Chancellor said that SLT would be carrying out a detailed analysis of the rankings. He said that the University needed to get underneath why some subjects were declining and others were improving. It was felt that the University had done as much as it could to maximise its returns to get it to where it currently lay in the rankings. Further rises up the rankings would need to come from concrete improvements. The University also needed to look at other ways of promoting itself which went beyond the league tables.

The Board noted that the NSS was quite volatile as it only asked the final year cohort once their opinions of the University. It asked whether years 1 and 2 were asked the same questions in order to try and avoid any surprises and rectify any concerns before they went into their final year. It was confirmed that this did happen. The OfS was also considering rolling out the survey to all years and PGT students.

The Board asked whether the University was looking at the big risers in the rankings and whether it could learn from these. The Director of Strategic Planning said that the University did look at other institutions and why they have had high rises. Often this was due to having a very good NSS. They may have also done well in metrics which were less relevant to the University such as research but lessons can still be learned.

The Board **noted** the KPI update.

95/19 STUDENT RECRUITMENT UPDATE

Paper 4 refers

This was presented by the Director of Recruitment. She told the Board that there was still a lot of uncertainty as to what the final numbers would be. Following the UCAS deadline the University is now 24 acceptances down on last year but was doing better than other institutions within its competitor group and slightly better than the sector overall. It was therefore important that the University had a good clearing campaign that would recruit additional students rather than replacing students who had been lost through adjustment.

The results day for BTech and A-level students is 13 August. There is a lot of uncertainty around results but sentiment amongst prospective students seems to be positive. The University will be sending an email to students after results day.

The Board were told that the clearing campaigns had been launched with webpages developed, hotlines set up, and the University had lists of people to call. The University would also be matched with potential students through the new UCAS+ tool. Due to it being the first year of its use it was not clear how beneficial UCAS+ would be.

The numbers for postgraduate taught courses (“PGT”) were looking positive and the University was recruiting more PGT students who lived locally. PGCE was particularly positive being 20% ahead of last year.

International recruitment was still very uncertain with many countries still under lockdown. The UKVI was however being more flexible making it easier to transition students in. Brexit was an incentive for some EU students to come to the UK this academic year before the changes in immigration rules were introduced. It was possible that there would be more international

students starting at the University in January if the Covid-19 restrictions were loosened both domestically and abroad.

Communications were being sent to students who had accepted places informing them of how the University was looking to re-open at the start of the term. The Board were told that numbers of students wishing to live in University accommodation looked encouraging; however, in line with the rest of sector the University was not taking deposits.

The Board of Governors **noted** the student recruitment update.

96/19 MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS

Paper 5 refers

The management accounts to the end of April 2020 were presented by the CFO. These were the first set of accounts post the Covid-19 lockdown. The CFO said that in the year to March the University was running £0.5m ahead of budget for the year. The position to end of April was that the University had a £2.2m operating profit and was £0.6m ahead of the revised budgeted position. The ledgers had been closed for the end of May with the position of the University improving to a £2.8m operating profit which was in line with the pre-coronavirus budget. The CFO cautioned that some of this better than expected performance may be due to phasing but he was cautiously encouraged by these figures.

The Board **noted** the management accounts and thanked the financial team for their terrific performance in response to the lockdown.

97/19 BUDGET 2020/2021 AND FINANCIAL PROJECTIONS

Paper 6 refers

The budget and financial projections were presented by the CFO. The Board had previously approved a revised five-year financial plan following the coronavirus pandemic.

The CFO said that the University was soon going to be in a position to draw down the £4m loan from Barclays and had also sought to reduce costs. The University had also been required to find 6% in savings across all departments which parts of the University had exceeded in many instances. To achieve this the focus had been on as far as possible on non-staff costs but there had also been wage freezes, overtime freezes, and additional controls put in place for the hiring of new staff. As a consequence there had been a smaller number of redundancies than expected.

The Board was told that there has been some finessing of capital expenditure. The original assumption was that capital expenditure would be £2.3m; however, in light of the current situation it was felt appropriate to slightly increase the capital expenditure envelope with there being a modest amount of investment in the student experience.

The Board's attention was drawn to graph one of the paper showing the new five-year trajectory. This showed that the University would be achieving a healthy operating profit in years 3 and 4.

The Board asked about the University's ability to survive a second spike in coronavirus cases and potentially a second lockdown. The CFO said that if the current recruitment

projections were correct and on the basis that the University obtained the loan from Barclays then the University should be able to ride it out although potentially additional in-year savings would need to be found.

The Board asked about the relocation from Regal House and the extent to which the operational savings had been accounted for. The CFO said that the departure from Regal House had been factored in. Notice had been served and the refurbishment of E&F block was underway.

The Board asked what operational savings there would be from the implementation of the SRS. The CFO said that the SRS was looking positive in terms of delivery. A trajectory of savings was expected to be achieved over the next five years so that the depreciation costs would be covered; however, in year one this was likely to be quite low and in the region of £0.5m.

The CFO was asked to what extent wage restraint was possible due to pay negotiations in the HE sector being carried out on a national basis. The CFO said that the level of money that the University was looking to save through wage restraint was £400k. This would primarily be achieved at senior level which was within the control of the University.

The Board noted that the amount of cash that the University would have in 2025 was £30m and asked whether the CFO had a figure in mind as to what the cash balance would be beyond that. The CFO said that the assumed cash level for 2025 was based on capital expenditure being £2m per annum which is the bare minimum. He said that it is unlikely that capital expenditure would remain that low for the full five-year period. The CFO said that that finance should be an enabler for the University and the University should be looking at having £8m-£10m in cash in the bank to be comfortable.

The Board voted on whether to approve the budget for 2020/2021 and the financial projections. The voting was as follows:-

In favour: 14 votes
Against: 0 votes
Abstentions: 0

The budget for 2020/2021 and the financial projections were therefore **approved** by the Board.

98/19 ACADEMIC ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE

Paper 7 refers

This was presented by the PVC (Academic Strategy). He said that there had been some examination of the University's academic strategy which had look at the areas of strength and those that were in decline and how the academic departments of the University could be structured. It was proposed that SHAS would remain a faculty with EHSS being broken up into institutes of Education, Business and Law, and Theology and Liberal Arts.

The PVC (Academic Strategy) said that Drama St Mary's would become part of SHAS due to the synergies between the two in relation to performance and wellbeing. In order to revive History and English the courses that were currently being run would potentially be closed down but with the new Liberal Arts degree continuing to have majors in either History or English. Liberal Arts would then be folded into Theology to create a new institute.

The Board said that the location of Liberal Arts within Theology was quite exciting and would create a unique opportunity and help the University pursue its Catholic mission. It was also a good time to make this change.

The Board asked whether having majors in History and English in a Liberal Arts Course would have an effect on the University being able to attract the sufficient quality of staff to teach them. The PVC (Academic Strategy) said that currently neither course was attracting sufficient students but he was confident that the liberal arts format would make it more attractive for both students and scholars.

The Board asked about whether there was an alternative to the nomenclature of “Institutes”. The PVC (Academic Strategy) said that other options had been considered including calling them colleges. There had been some consultation with the PVC (Global Engagement) about this and it was felt that this was the best terminology to use and also both Education and Theology were already institutes and were successful.

The Board asked about the move of Drama St Mary’s to SHAS. It asked whether communications needed to be as to why it should be there. The PVC (Academic Strategy) said that students tend to identify by subject rather than faculty or institute. He said that drama colleagues were looking forward to join SHAS and having access to its facilities.

The Board voted on whether it would endorse the proposals contained within the paper. The voting was as follows:-

In favour: 14 Votes
Against: 0 Votes
Abstentions: 0

The Board endorsed the proposals contained within the paper.

99/19 EQUALITY AND INCLUSION

Paper 8

This was presented by the COO. She told the Board that she and the Vice-Chancellor had met with various groups of staff and students to discuss the issues raised by the “Black Lives Matter” movement. She said that a number of themes had been identified and these were outlined in the paper. These included:-

Representation – lack of BAME academic staff leaving students feeling under-represented.

Strategic Approach – While work has been done to improve equality and diversity at the University it hasn’t necessarily hung together and has lacked clarity. There are also no explicit aims for equality and diversity set out in Vision 2025.

Diversity of curriculum – Students highlighted the need for University to consider different learning styles, more diverse reading lists and have more diverse external speakers.

Procedures – Student raised concerns about the University’s complaints procedure and how complaints were not being properly dealt with. In response to this the

University has sought to hold back on approving a new complaints procedure until these concerns have been addressed.

Police and local community – These concerns were raised primarily by students and had not been raised in other forums before. This had included students being stopped and searched by police on the way to and from campus. It highlighted the need for the University to work more with the police to make them more mindful of the effects of their actions.

Students Union – There were concerns regarding the lack of BAME representation of students within the SU and also the support that can be provided by the SU.

It was planned that the issue of equality and diversity would be looked in more detail over the coming weeks. It was thought that work would be done towards achieving the race equality charter.

The Vice-Chancellor said that there was a lot more work that needed to be done. He said that there has been a lot of listening and he has responded to every staff member and student who has approached him on the issue. He said that work was still needed to be done to get the views from groups who have not yet wanted to share their views. Equality and diversity issues will be considered within the strategic review. The roles and responsibilities of SLT in owning these issues would also be considered.

The Vice-Chancellor said that he had found the conversations enlightening and constructive. The students had been generally positive, showing a love for the University and wanting to make things better, but he had also heard from people who have had bad experiences. He said that it was important to work in partnership with Students' Union.

The Student Life President said that the University should look at the topic of blind marking as some students felt that their work may be differently due to the ethnicity and skin colour. He said that the Students' Union wanted to work closely with BAME students and staff members, He wanted everyone to feel welcome and be part of the Students' Union and the student community but this was easier said than done and it was eye-opening as to how much work was needed to be done.

The Board noted that it has a lack of BAME membership. It was thought that there could be some consideration of this issue by members of the nominations committee. As a Board it may be necessary for it to overhaul how it recruits Board members to ensure more diversity. The Clerk is currently drafting a paper on Board recruitment and it is hoped that this will be shared over the summer.

The Board said that direct representation on these matters makes a difference but anonymous feedback would also be helpful. The Student Life President said that this would be happening in the Students' Union. The COO said that the Race Equality Charter was very data led. She said that there was a place for anonymous reporting and it can show themes but it cannot lead to action on specific cases so a blended approach was needed.

The Board **noted** the Equality and Inclusion report.

100/19 SCHEME OF DELEGATION

Paper 9

This will be presented by the Clerk. The Scheme of Delegation was in need of updating having not been reviewed since 2016. The Scheme is split into two parts with the first part

setting out how powers are delegated and an appendix in the second part showing a table summarising these delegations. The Scheme is intended to be a living document being updated on a more regular basis than currently.

A couple of amendments has been suggested by the COO at 9.3 and 9.4 about senior staff salaries and suspension of members of staff..

The Board voted on whether to approve the Scheme of Delegation subject to the amendments suggested by the Board and COO. The vote was as follows:-

In favour: 14 votes

Against: 0 Votes

Abstentions: 0

The Scheme of Delegation was therefore **approved** by the Board.

101/19 PROGRESS AGAINST NEWCOMBE/KEMP ACTIONS

Paper 10 refers

This was presented by the Clerk. An outstanding internal audit action was for the Board to note the completion of the actions set down in the Newcombe and Kemp reports on University governance and management. The Clerk said that all of the actions had been completed with the exception of the Board holding an annual event to engage with members of the University community. Such an event could be considered next year when the pandemic had passed.

The Board said that more could potentially be done to mentor and induct new members. The Clerk said that this could be done and there would be some consideration of this in the autumn as the Board looked to recruit new members.

The Board **noted** the progress against the actions set out in the Newcombe and Kemp reports and that these could now be closed.556

102/19 STUDENTS UNION REPORT

Paper 11 refers

The Students' Union report was **noted** by the Board.

103/19 PREVENT MONITORING ASSESSMENT OUTCOME

Paper 12 refers

This was presented by the COO. She informed the Board that the University had been found to be at "no greater risk" and that the University was compliant with the legislation.

The Board **noted** the Prevent Monitoring Assessment outcome.

PART B

ITEMS FOR NOTE INCLUDING DECISIONS UNDER DELEGATED POWERS

104/19 AUDIT COMMITTEE

Paper 13 refers

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 May 2020 were **noted** by the Board.

105/19 FINANCE AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Paper 14 refers

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 June 2020 were **noted** by the Board.
Minutes of Academic Board

106/19 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

107/19 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Wednesday 7 October 2020
Wednesday 14 October 2020 (Away Day)
Tuesday 24 November 2021
Thursday 28 January 2021
Wednesday 10 March 2021 (Away Day)
Wednesday 28 April 2021
Wednesday 16 June 2021