



BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Minutes of a meeting held at 12.00 on 13 February 2020 at Newton Park Campus

Present:

Mr T Jagger (Chair)	Prof P Martin
Ms E Casey	Dr S McMillan
Mr R Clarke (by teleconference)	Ms J Nesbitt-Larking (SU President)
Ms T Fisk	Prof S Rigby (Vice-Chancellor)
Mr J Glasspool	Ms J Saunders
Ms R Heald	Dr C Wiffen
Mr S Lockren (by teleconference)	

In attendance:

Ms R di Corpo (Governance Manager)
Ms S Dawes (Students' Union Chief Executive) [For items 11 & 12]
Mr P Fox (Pro Vice-Chancellor (Finance and Infrastructure)) ("PVC F&I")
Dr M McGuinness (Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic Planning)) ("PVC AP") [For item 8]
Mr D Newman (University Secretary)
Prof N Sammells (Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost) ("DVC")

Apologies:

Ms V Nawathe
Ms S Lane

19/32 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The chair welcomed all present to the meeting, including Mr Lockren and Mr Clarke via teleconference, and noted the apologies received from Ms Nawathe and Ms Lane. The chair confirmed that Dr McGuinness and Ms Dawes would join the meeting for items 8, 11 and 12 respectively.

19/33 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 20 NOVEMBER 2019

The draft minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record.

19/34 MATTERS ARISING

All actions had been resolved or formed part of the meeting's agenda.

19/35 CHAIR'S BUSINESS

4.1 Chancellor Search Committee Terms of Reference (Paper G1080)

On 18 December 2019 the board was notified of Jeremy Irons' intention to retire from the Office of Chancellor following the summer graduations of 2020. Given the forthcoming vacancy it was proposed that a Chancellor Search Committee (search committee) should be established to

identify and nominate a suitable candidate, subject to the board's prior approval of a person specification and process for appointment to the role.

The board considered and agreed the proposal to establish the search committee, as distinct from the Nominations Committee, based on the involvement of the Vice-Chancellor (VC) as chair and the inclusion of student representation in its membership. Acknowledging the representational nature of the role, emphasis was given to the importance of the selection criteria, as well as transparency of process. The chair reassured governors that the search committee would be keeping him closely informed throughout the process and that the board will be kept updated in a timely manner. The chair invited any independent governors interested in membership of the committee to let him know.

[Post meeting note: the chair has asked T. Fisk and R. Clarke to serve on this committee and they have agreed to do so.]

The chair expressed his thanks to the current chancellor, noting there will be opportunities to formerly mark the transition in due course. The board approved the proposed Chancellor Search Committee Terms of Reference, presented at Appendix 1.

4.2 Recruitment of Independent Governors

The secretary updated the board on the recruitment process for independent governors. With recommendations received from governors, individuals would be invited to submit an application, to be considered by a panel of independent governors, followed by a process of interview and appraisal. The chair reminded governors that this approach was on the basis of needing to target individuals with specific skills and expertise.

4.3 Nominations Committee Terms of Reference (Paper G1081)

The board considered the proposed terms of reference for the revived nominations committee. It was noted that the committee will make recommendations to the board in respect of board appointments, as opposed to deciding/ approving the membership. It was proposed that an addition to section 2 of the terms of reference be made; to reflect that the nominations committee would review the diversity and inclusion of the board as part of its remit.

Subject to this amendment, the board approved the proposed Nominations Committee Terms of Reference, presented at Appendix 1, including the appointment of the chair of the board of governors as committee chair and the following governors as members: T Fisk, J Glasspool and J Saunders.

19/36 VICE-CHANCELLOR'S UPDATE (Paper G1082)

The Vice-Chancellor (VC) presented her report to the board.

External environment

Brexit: Led by the PVC (F&I), Bath Spa is working with EU nationals to offer staff and students up to date information for their changing needs, while also keeping a focus on wider changes such as participation in Erasmus Plus and international research activity going forward.

New government direction of travel: It was announced that the government response to the Augar Review will be delayed until the spending review later in the year. With priorities yet to be

confirmed by the new Conservative government, indications point to three short-term areas of focus – unconditional offers, grade inflation and ‘low value courses’.

Union update: It was confirmed that UCU members voted in favour of strike action over pay and conditions, which is expected to play out through the spring. The board discussed the potential impact on students and were reassured the university was putting mitigations in place wherever possible. The board noted, for the record, the acronym UCEA should be identified as the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (Paper G1082, para. 2.14).

Internal environment

The Vice-Chancellor highlighted core priorities.

National Student Survey: The NSS is now open with opportunities being arranged for students to participate and work is underway for NSS 2021 with staff reviewing and updating action plans.

Financial sustainability: A full mid-year financial review is due to be reported to the Finance & Infrastructure Committee (F&IC) on 26 February. The outlook for 2020/21 and future years is currently also being updated in light of the close of UCAS admissions. The PVC (F&I) highlighted two potential wildcards for financial planning: the impact of the impending strike action and the current coronavirus (Covid-19) global public health issue.

Identity Themes: The board had previously indicated that reporting against identity themes be through an annual report on progress with intermittent major papers to the board and ad hoc updates as necessary. The chair and VC subsequently agreed a timeline for major papers with the VC’s update papers providing a route for *ad hoc* reporting. The programme for the forthcoming board away day includes workshops around two themes: Our Unique Offer and Civic Engagement.

UK College for Business and Computing (UKCBC): The DVC briefed the board on the background and context to UKCBC as a private educational provider with which Bath Spa has an established partnership. The current arrangement is a five year franchise agreement. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Bath Spa is now seeking ways to develop the relationship through deepening collaboration with them in the UK and by exploring the potential to partner with them internationally. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The board was sympathetic to the complexity of the opportunity but was supportive of the broad approach proposed by the DVC and authorized the Executive to proceed with the registration process with [REDACTED] for the establishment of a branch campus. A detailed business plan would be presented to the board in due course, for confirmation and approval of the proposed arrangements.

[ACTION: DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR]

The Vice-Chancellor highlighted other areas of strategic importance or general interest.

Research ethics training: the board commended the university’s recent work in this area given the resulting impact in terms of positioning in the Research Excellence Framework (REF).

Harassment and sexual abuse in universities: The Office for Students (OfS) is presently running a consultation on proposed regulation in this area to which Bath Spa will be submitting a response. The VC will present a paper regarding harassment and sexual misconduct for the board's consideration once the OfS has communicated its position. It is likely that regulation will begin in the next academic year. The VC and Students' Union (SU) are maintaining close dialogue on this issue. The relevance of the student disciplinary procedure introduced at the start of the current academic year was noted.

Climate emergency: The board noted the new date for the declaration of a Climate Emergency by the university and SU, in partnership. *[Secretary's note: declaration made 27 February 2020]*

New Year Honours: The board noted that Jiemin Tomita and Professor Allyson MacVean were awarded an MBE and an OBE, respectively, in the New Year Honours. The board offered their congratulations on the awards. The chair also thanked Professor McVean and Dr Mark Loon for their fascinating presentation on the new Centre for Leadership, Ethics and Professional Practice to the board, prior to the meeting.

2019 Costa Award for Best Children's Book: The board noted that Bath Spa alumna, Jasbinder Bilan, won the award for 'Asha and the Spirit Bird'. This is one in a long line of publishing successes from the MA in Writing for Young People.

19/37 KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (Paper G1083)

The VC summarised the proposed approach to the identity KPIs following the board's recommendation at its November 2019 meeting for the data set to align more closely to the seven themes of identity work in the three-year plan. Once the KPIs and milestones are agreed, targets for the identity KPIs will be set, with a combination of numerical targets, milestones and surveys reflecting that some themes lend themselves better than others to numeric measurements of success. The VC clarified that the ambition is held more in the description of the themes than in the KPIs which are necessarily high-level.

The board acknowledged the following:

- Headline KPIs will be supplemented with the breadth and detail of activity and measures;
- The scope for building carbon emission into decision-making;
- An emphasis on outward looking dimensions of Our Unique Offer;
- The potential for the proposed alumni survey in helping to demonstrate the value of degrees and to maintain links with students and networks;
- Immediate to long-term opportunities for regional connectivity (cross-cutting themes).

Governors commented in particular on the KPI under Our Unique Offer, to [REDACTED] noting this anticipated grade was well judged. Putting Bath Spa's significant uplift in research capacity into context, the Research Excellence Framework (REF) is the UK's system for assessing the quality of research in UK higher education (HE) institutions. The VC advised the board that its purpose is to provide accountability for public investment in research and produce evidence of the benefits of the investment, to provide benchmarking information and establish reputational yardsticks, for use within the HE sector and for public information, and to inform the selective allocation of funding for research. Three distinct elements are assessed: the quality of outputs (e.g. publications, performances, and exhibitions), their impact beyond academia, and the environment that supports research; scored

with a star rating accordingly. The highest rating at four stars is recognised as *world-leading*, and three-stars recognised as *internationally excellent*.

The board considered the university's approach and approved the suggested tabulated set of targets and milestones for the identity themes, to complement the agreed core KPIs, presented at section 3 (Paper G1083).

[J Saunders left the meeting]

19/38 PRESENTATION: SU PRESIDENT UPDATE ON STUDENTS' UNION ACTIVITIES AND THE STUDENT BODY (JUL 2019-JAN 2020) (Paper G1084)

The SU President updated the board on SU activities and the student body, focusing on three key areas: SU priorities, feedback from students (redbrick research), and methods of engagement (current and future changes). Identifying three priority areas helps to convey what the SU stands for and to more effectively focus SU resources for the benefit of students.

[J Saunders re-joined the meeting]

The SU has received positive feedback from students on the new Locksbrook campus regarding its location, the facilities and knowing who they can contact. The SU continues to explore new ways of engaging with students, and measuring that engagement. For example, the recent SU redbrick survey generated 1,030 (completed) responses via Instagram.

Student welfare and the student community continues to be a priority area for the SU. The board acknowledged that the increase in loneliness reported by students is a sector-wide issue. Student concerns are not only related to their studies, but to accommodation, class size and their physical environment. The SU President advised that the university's Student Wellbeing Services (SWS) provide excellent services for students, and that the SU and university management are working closely to determine what more can be done.

The chair welcomed the helpful, extensive update and it was agreed that the SU President would periodically be invited to present to the board on two to three key issues. The VC was supportive of this as a way of keeping governors informed.

[ACTION: SU PRESIDENT; UNIVERSITY SECRETARY]

[M. McGuinness joined the meeting]

19/39 UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT RECRUITMENT 2018/2019 AND 2019/2020 (Paper G1085)

The PVC (AP) updated the board on undergraduate student recruitment activity over two admissions cycles, 2018/19 and 2019/20, the latter of which is ongoing. The discussion was contextualised by four key points:

- i. The current environment is particularly challenging. There is a continuing decline in the number of young people in the UK and an increase in the levels of competition between universities for student numbers. [REDACTED]
- ii. The sector has seen a dramatic increase in the number of last minute submissions: 27% of Bath Spa's applications were received within the final five days of the application cycle, with

71% of applications received in the final four weeks of the nineteen week cycle. It is a buyers' market, and while students are benefiting from more informed decision-making, projections are proving difficult for universities in periods of uncertainty.

- iii. Bath Spa's existing engagement activities for undergraduate recruitment is excellent, evidenced by conversion rates, surveys and feedback from student ambassadors and staff. However, aggressive solutions to market changes are required to stabilise the applicant pipeline. Increased engagement with schools forms part of this strategy.
- iv. The university needs to both adapt its existing portfolio and add more new courses. Bath Spa's new degrees contributed 7.9% of the total applications for 2018/19 and 2019/20.

[REDACTED]

Recruitment is a core activity for the university and the board commended the PVC (AP) for the sophisticated and informative paper on this issue. Governors supported the university's intentions to develop, over time and with due sensitivity, an undergraduate portfolio that meets student and employer demands, suggesting that more work could perhaps be done to communicate externally the positive impact of this approach.

The PVC (AP) referred to sector data on percentage growth versus enrolment numbers for English Higher Education providers (source: DataHE communication, 24.1.20). This illustrates that universities offering vocational courses were typically performing better overall. The board also noted Bath Spa's proportionate increase in acceptances outpaced not only its direct competitors but most of the sector.

The board considered the university's planning around undergraduate recruitment, acknowledging the current market environment and risks as presented, and endorsed the PVC (AP)'s proposed way forward.

[M. McGuinness left the meeting]

19/40 ESTATES STRATEGY 2020-2030 (Paper G1086)

The PVC (F&I) updated the board on the evolution of the estates strategy in light of the need to align with Strategy 2030 within the context of the university's financial position. Emphasising the long term direction of travel, the paper sets out what has already been agreed by governors, as well as highlighting what might be new.

The board noted the strategic and financial context (paras. 4.1-4.5) and existing university masterplan (paras. 4.6-4.7), acknowledging the importance of the tri-party relationship between the university, Duchy of Cornwall and Bath and North East Somerset Council (B&NES).

The PVC (F&I) provided further context for plans regarding the university's campuses and sites, detailed as Newton Park (paras. 4.8-4.14), Locksbrook Road (paras. 4.15-4.22), Sion Hill & Culverhay (paras. 4.23-.27), Green Park House (paras. 4.28-4.31) and Corsham Court (paras. 4.32-4.34).

[REDACTED]

[J. Saunders and N. Sammells left the meeting]
[S. Dawes joined the meeting]
[T. Jagger left the meeting; J. Glasspool assumed the chair]

19/42 STUDENTS' UNION ANNUAL REPORT 2018/2019 (Paper G1088)

The Governors noted the approved copy of the SU Annual Report 2018-19, as required by the Education Act 1994, presented at Appendix A, including the achievements detailed in the Trustees Annual Report and Accounts for 2018-19.

19/43 STUDENTS' UNION PROPOSAL TO INCORPORATE AS A CHARITABLE INCORPORATED ORGANISATION (Paper G1089)

At the June 2019 board of governors the decision taken by the Students' Union's Board of Trustees to incorporate was communicated. This followed the recommendation to do so from the Union's External Auditors in their Management Letter to the Union's Board of Trustees in November 2018. The process to incorporate involves the establishment of a new incorporated charitable entity, the transfer of all assets and liabilities from the existing to the new organisation and the eventual closure of the current charity. The Union has established a Task and Finish Group to oversee the process and make recommendations to its board of trustees. The University Secretary has been kept informed of the work of this group.

The chair thanked the SU chief executive for her paper and the proposal was supported by the board. The board approved the draft Constitution to enable the Bath Spa Students' Union to incorporate as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (subject to final amendment as detailed in paragraph 4.4.). The board approved the draft letter of support from the Bath Spa board of governors to the Department for Education to establish the new organisation under the name 'Bath Spa University Students' Union', and agreed to delegate authority to the chair to sign the letter.

[S. Dawes left the meeting]
[T. Jagger re-joined the meeting and resumed the chair]
[J. Saunders re-joined the meeting]

The decisions at 19/43 were summarised and agreed in the presence of T. Jagger and J. Saunders.

19/43 UNIVERSITY RISK REGISTER (Paper G1087)

The University Secretary presented the updated strategic risk register to the board. The chair of the Audit Committee confirmed the IT Director presented on 'cyber essentials' accreditation at its last meeting with annual reporting agreed as one way to manage the risk. The chair proposed a brief update on cyber essentials in the VC's update reports at future meetings, given its importance. The chair of the F&IC suggested the risk register may need amending following the board away day given the focus on reducing financial impact. It was agreed an indication of changes to risk scores would be helpful when the register is next reviewed by the board, and that the narrative contained within the register would be finessed at the point of next review by

management. The board noted the University Risk Register.

[ACTION: VICE-CHANCELLOR; UNIVERSITY SECRETARY]

19/44 OTHER ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

The Academic Board 28 January 2020 draft minutes were received for information.

19/45 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The chair confirmed that the programme for the forthcoming board away day had been finalised and that governors should now have the final agenda and schedule.

The next board meeting will take place on 1 April 2020 unless otherwise advised.

The meeting closed at 15:50


Governance Manager
February 2020

Signed as a record of confirmed minutes by:

Mr Terence Jagger

Chair

Date

Terence Jagger
7th Sept 2020