



BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Minutes of the meeting held on the 6th October 2014

14/01 Attendance

1.1 Present

Mr J Pallett	Chair
Mr J Bateman	
Mrs M Chamberlain	
Mr T Clarke	
Mr D Dale	
Mrs O Fielding	
Professor D Green	Vice Chancellor
Mrs A Hooper	
Mr W Hudson	
Mr D Iddon	
Mrs A Leonetti	
Dr D McDougall	
Mr M Newitt	
Mr T Patrickson	
Rev'd Dr A Pettersen	
Mrs C Richardson	
Mrs S Speck	
Mrs J Swan	
Dr R Woolley	

1.2 In Attendance

Mr R Bonham	Director of Finance
Miss A Clarke	Vice President, Students' Union
Ms H Johnstone	Assistant University Secretary
Mr J Ryan	University Secretary

1.3 Apologies

Professor M Clarke
Mrs O Fielding
Mr Z Padda

1.4 Election of Chair

Mr Pallett was re-elected Chair of the Board of Governors for the 2014/15 session. It was noted that Mr Pallett would be retiring from the Board at the end of the academic year.

1.5 Election of Vice Chairs

Mr Mike Newitt and Mrs Aude Leonetti were elected as Vice Chairs for the 2014/15 session. It was noted that Mr Newitt would be retiring from the Board at the end of the academic year.

1.6 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

1.7 Terms of Reference [BG14/01]

The Board received its terms of reference for information.

1.8 Chair's Business

The Chair welcomed Mr David Iddon, Mrs Charmian Richardson and Rev'd Dr Alvyn Pettersen to their first meeting of the Board.

14/02 Minutes

2.1 The open minutes of the meeting held on the 14th July 2014 [BG14/02] were confirmed as a correct record.

2.2 There were no matters arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

14/03 Student Recruitment [BG14/04 refers]

3.1 The University Secretary presented the report on student recruitment, retention, achievement and satisfaction. Members noted that this had previously been discussed at length at the Finance & Development Committee and a summary of this discussion was in the report from the Committee to the Board.

3.2 The student recruitment position for 2014/15 was much as expected although recruitment through the clearing and confirmation period had been better than anticipated. The outcome was disappointing and it was the first time in many years that the University had bucked the national trend in numbers applying to University. However, it is unlikely that this will have a significant impact on the University's financial position for the coming year. The Finance & Development Committee have requested that further analysis is undertaken so that work can be carried out to reverse the trend in 2015/16. A range of activities are underway to address the situation. These include analysing recruitment to subjects nationally to assess how the University's recruitment matches trends and identifying subjects which have the potential to recruit well.

3.3 The results for progression and achievement remain satisfactory with some areas improving. Completion rates for students on BA/BSc courses, excluding ITE and Nursing, have improved – 83.9% compared to 81.5% in 2012/13. The equivalent figure for HND/Foundation Degrees is lower than 2012/13 (82% compared to 85%). However the numbers are smaller and therefore more volatile. This is an area in which the University performs particularly well. The overall first degree completion rate as published in the HEFCE Performance Indicators is 85.4 which places the University as equal 64th in a league table of all universities. The Board congratulated University officers on a significantly improved position over recent years and recognised that this had been an area of particular concern in the past.

3.4 The University Secretary reported that the number of withdrawals from the University had increased (12.3% compared with 11.5% in 2012/13) and this was an area of particular concern. If the trend continues it will impact on the University's performance against its HEFCE Performance Indicator on Non-Continuation (6% against a benchmark of 8%). A number of initiatives are underway to address this position. It was noted that there was a range of reasons for withdrawals including financial concerns, homesickness, a perception the course wasn't as expected. There was particular concern over the high number of young male students leaving who generally did not discuss their withdrawal with anyone. The introduction of Firstpoint in 2012 which brought all student support services into one area had improved the level of support of students who were thinking of leaving as the support and advice they needed was immediately available.

3.5 The University's overall satisfaction score in the National Student Survey has decreased from 85% in 2013 to 83% in 2014 which is 3% below the University's HEFCE benchmark. Members noted that this result had been discussed in detail by the Finance & Development Committee and action plans have been developed to address the position. The Committee had advised that it required assurances that the action plans are being implemented. The University Secretary advised that

some areas which had performed very well in 2013 had not performed so well in 2014 and the data was being interrogated to identify where the issues were. It was recognised that a range of measures would be needed to improve student satisfaction, some of which would be quick wins and some which would take longer to have an impact.

3.6 It was recognised that in the past when the University's student retention figures had fallen the position had been turned around due to a wide range of activities. Members agreed that if the University was to take the same approach to student satisfaction and withdrawals then this too should result in a positive outcome.

3.7 The Board received the report.

14/04 Vice Chancellor's Business

4.1 The Vice Chancellor updated the Board on the University's position generally at the start of session. It was noted that the University was forecast to achieve a £7m surplus in its 2013/14 accounts. The recent Welcome Weekend for new students had been very well organised and the range of summer refurbishments including the dining hall was helping to provide a positive experience for new students.

4.2 The Institute of Health and Society has won a number of contracts to deliver CPD provision and the new Masters course, Physicians Associate, had been well received. The University had welcomed a record number of students with ABB+ equivalent qualifications; the majority of these had BTEC qualification and were studying in the Institute of Sport and Exercise Science. Student numbers have increased in Biology and Biochemistry and two new staff will be joining the Institute of Science and the Environment to run the new Mathematics course.

4.3 The national position relating to teacher training continues to be unsure. The University is one of the ten biggest providers in the country and this is a key area of the University's provision. It is anticipated that the change of Secretary of State will bring a change in approach. Government policy is also impacting on the training of nurses and midwives. There has been a zero increase in the price per place although this is a better position than the decrease previously intimated.

4.4 Locally the Worcester College of Technology and NEW College have merged to form the Heart of Worcestershire College. The Principal of Warwickshire College has left and the Chair of their Board of Governors is currently the Interim Principal. The FE sector as a whole is very volatile. The University will continue to work with its partner institutions and offer support where it can.

4.5 There have been some isolated issues around student behaviour in non-University managed accommodation and these are being dealt with through collaboration of University staff, PCSOs and West Mercia. A few City Councillors had met with the Vice Chancellor and had raised concerns about the pressure the amount of student accommodation was placing on the city. In relation to this the St Mary's Covent School had come on the market which could possibly provide space for additional student accommodation. A special meeting of the Board would be organised for members to consider if this is an acquisition the University should consider.

4.6 As previously reported the University has bucked the national trend in applications for the first time since the Vice Chancellor was appointed. The University had been one of the fastest growing institutions, growing 7 times faster than the national average. The Vice Chancellor advised that the success of the University in the past had been very much due to a range of new courses being introduced. There is now an urgent need to re-focus energy on course development. A new initiative, Campaign 2015, had been put in place which was looking at a range of measures to address recruitment including curriculum review and new course development, changes to the website to make it more accessible on a wider range of devices, a number of Graduate Ambassadors had been recruited who would visit schools and partner institutions to talk about being a student to potential applicants. Quicker turnaround times for making offers had been introduced which it is hoped will improve conversion rates.

4.7 In relation to the National Student Survey the Vice Chancellor commented that it had taken a number of years for the impact of the investment in the Hive to improve the level of satisfaction with learning resources. Satisfaction levels under 'organisation and management' were low and this

generally related to timetabling and room changes. A new approach to timetabling which was student led was being piloted this year in some areas and would be rolled out across the University next year. The University had conducted a student survey of all first and second years for the first time in 2013/14 and an action plan was in place to address issues raised.

- 4.8 It was noted that over the summer period the Pro Vice Chancellor (Capital Developments), Deputy Vice Chancellor, the Director of Capital Developments and the Director of Communication and Participation had all left the University either due to retirement or relocation. The University Secretary and Pro Vice Chancellor (Students) would be retiring at the end of the academic year and the Head of the Institute of Humanities and Creative Arts had recently announced her retirement at Christmas. The new Pro Vice Chancellor (International) Dr Heather Forland has joined the University and interviews will be held for the Pro Vice Chancellor (Academic) and Pro Vice Chancellor (Business Development) posts in October. The Director of Finance's role will be extended to include overall responsibility for Estates. A joint appointment of Acting Head of the Institute of Humanities and Creative Arts had been made which would be reviewed at the end of the academic year, it is hoped that this will provide some stability to the area which has been affected by the downturn in applications. The role of the University Secretary and Pro Vice Chancellor (Students) will be split and a new role of Pro Vice Chancellor (Student and Staff Engagement) created.
- 4.9 The Board discussed the various actions identified for addressing the fall in student satisfaction highlighted by the National Student Survey and the work underway to address recruitment.

14/05 Open Report from Finance & Development Committee [BG14/05]

- 5.1 The Director of Finance reported that 2013/14 had been a successful year and a surplus of £7m was forecast. The University has a healthy bank balance and will easily achieve its bank covenants.
- 5.2 In terms of the 2014/15 budget allowance had been made for a drop in student numbers when the budget was created. The Director of Finance advised that 100% of staff costs had been included in the budget and savings would be made during the year through the normal occurrence of vacancies. It was noted that whilst the budget was healthy for 2014/15 if the downturn in student numbers continued into 2015/16 this would have a significant impact on the University's finances.
- 5.3 Members noted the improved position on the outstanding SLC debt relating to 2013/14 which currently stood at £650k. It was noted that some of the problems related to the interface between the Finance and the Registry Services record systems but that significant work had been carried out over the past year to improve these. In addition the University's modular scheme gave students the opportunity to amend their route of study and any change had to be notified to the SLC which then caused further delays.
- 5.4 The Board received the report.

14/06 Report from Audit Committee [BG14/06]

- 6.1 The Chair of the Committee presented the report to the Board. It was noted that the Committee had looked very carefully at the internal audit report on Cash Handling at the University Arena and reassured themselves that although the report gave a red level of assurance this was due to poor systems and there was no evidence of any impropriety. A follow up audit would be carried out in October with a further report to the next meeting of the Committee.
- 6.2 The Board noted the Strategy for Internal Audit for 2014/15 and that as well as the required annual audits, this would focus on areas which impacted on the student experience.
- 6.3 The Board received the report.

14/07 Risk Management

- 7.1 Institutional Risk Register [BG14/08]

- 7.1.1 The University Secretary presented the Risk Register to the Board advising that the Audit Committee had previously received the Register and discussed it at length. Members were reminded that the management of the University's risks was ultimately a responsibility of the Board which it delegated to the Audit Committee.
- 7.1.2 The Risk Register was reviewed on an annual basis and again this year the members of the University Executive assigned various risks had been required to update these in the Register.
- 7.1.3 The University Secretary reported that the annual Internal Audit on Risk Management would select two or three of the identified risks and track them through the University.
- 7.1.4 The Board received the revised Risk Register.

7.2 Risk Management Policy [BG14/09]

- 7.2.1 The Board noted that in response to a recommendation from the internal audit service the Risk Management Policy would be reviewed on an annual basis. The Audit Committee had considered the current policy and some minor amendments had been made.
- 7.2.2. The Board approved the revised Risk Management Policy.

14/08 Report from Academic Board [BG14/10]

- 8.1 The report from Academic Board was noted.

14/09 Report from Students' Union [BG14/11]

- 9.1 The President presented the report to the Board. Members noted that a rebranding exercise had been carried out which included colour coding the various activities of the Students' Union and this was carried through to the new website.
- 9.2 The Students' Union had participated, over the summer, in campaigns to stop the cuts being made to the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA). The cuts have been deferred for a year.
- 9.3 The sabbatical officers' priority for 2014/15 is to make as many students as possible aware of the Students' Union and its facilities. All induction sessions for new students were attended by one of the sabbatical officers who also participated in the international student induction week activities. A range of events which are not based around alcohol have been organised.
- 9.4 The Students' Union aim to increase the number of volunteering hours recorded by students from 16,000 achieved in 2013/14 to 22,000 hours. To assist with this students can now log their volunteering hours on line in a V-record.
- 9.5 The Vice President, Education reported that 250 students are now registered as Student Academic Representatives (StARs). There is a concerted effort to raise awareness of the scheme amongst students and staff. The University has funded the purchase of branded hoodies for all StARs and the Pro Vice Chancellor (Students) and Vice President will be attending Institute staff meetings to discuss the scheme. This year's StARs training will take place during the first Worcester Week with extra sessions being run for returning StARS.
- 9.6 The Vice President, Student Activities reported that the University had agreed to subsidise insurance payments for students joining various sports and societies and as a result the membership fees had been reduced. It is hoped that this will encourage more students to join. Training sessions have been run for sports and society committee members which were attended by 250 members. The process of starting a new society has been made easier and 4 new societies were approved recently by the student council bringing the total to approximately 80 societies.
- 9.7 The Board received the report.

14/10 Date of Next Meeting

10.1 24th November 2014

..... (Chair)

..... (Date)