

LUMINATE EDUCATION GROUP

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE UNIVERSITY CENTRE LEEDS BOARD HELD ON MONDAY 11 MARCH 2024

Present

Aisha Ali (from item 7)	Co-optee
Colin Booth	Group CEO & Governor
June Dennis	Co-optee
Mark Garratt (Chair)	Governor
Reece Longden	Student member
Rod Peet	Co-optee
David Tipple	Staff member

The quorum for the meeting was three members (including at least one governor)

In Attendance

Matt Burton	Interim Group Director of Marketing and Student Recruitment
Rebecca Fores	Associate Dean
Melanie Halstead	Director of Governance
Eleanor Harris	Governance Manager
Bill Jones	Deputy CEO and Executive Principal
Sarah Marquez	Dean of HE
Gemma Simmons-Blench	Deputy CEO, Curriculum & Quality
Joanne Tyssen	Director of HE Quality and Standards
Paul Ward	Group Head of Business Partnering
David Warren	Group Vice Principal Development
Joe Wilson	Principal, Leeds Conservatoire

The meeting started at 4.00pm.

PART 1 - MEETING ADMINISTRATION AND GOVERNANCE

1. Welcome and Apologies for Absence

The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting and introduced Rod Peet who had joined the board as a co-opted member. Apologies for absence were recorded from Javaad Alipoor (Co-optee) and Katie Miller (Co-optee).

2. Determination of Observers/Attendees at the Meeting

The board agreed and welcomed attendees/observers at the meeting as per the above attendance list.

3. Declaration of Interests in any Agenda Items

The Chair reminded board members of the requirement to declare their interest in any agenda items. There were none, other than the standing declarations as per the register of board members' interests, which were noted.

4. Minutes of the Meeting of the Board held on 20 November 2023 and consideration of any Actions or other Matters Arising

Members considered the draft minutes of the previous board meeting and a rolling list of actions and matters arising from previous meetings. It was noted that all actions were either complete or due for completion at a future date. A further discussion regarding marketing, international student recruitment and branding would be held during the student recruitment item on this agenda.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the board held on 20 November 2023 be approved as a true and accurate record and that these be signed by the Chair.

5. Communications

5a) Feedback from the Board Away Day

The UCLeeds Board Away Day was held on Friday 9 February. Board members were reminded that the day had focussed on agreeing the strategic direction for UCLeeds, including approval of the UCLeeds strategic priorities, and understanding how the board can support UCLeeds in achieving these. The full notes from the day are available to board members in the documents area of VBR.

Following the away day board members were invited to share their views on whether University Centre Leeds should be included as a separate annex in the Group Accountability Agreement, as is the case for the three FE colleges. It was agreed that, as UCLeeds is referenced in the Accountability Agreement statement and an objective to increase HTQ and degree apprenticeship enrolments for 2024/25 has been provisionally included under the Luminare targets, a separate annex for UCLeeds was not needed. As the submission is returned annually, it was agreed that this would be reviewed again next year.

5b) Update from Chair including feedback from Group Board

The Chair updated the board on the discussions and key decisions from the Group Board meetings which had taken place since November. At the December meeting the Group Board approved the 2022/23 year end audit and accounts, the Strategic and Operational Development Plan (SODP), Group Health & Safety Policy, Group Skills Statement, FE Self-Assessment Report (SAR) and Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) and the initial phase of the new international recruitment strategy. At an extraordinary meeting in January, the Group Board approved the updated Curriculum, Student Growth and Property Strategy and gave approval to proceed with the Pudsey Sixth Form College project, subject to construction contract costs being within the agreed budget and the ESFA approving the re-phasing of the loan drawdown.

The World Café was held in January, which was attended by several UCLeeds board members. Feedback from this event was shared at the board away day in February. The Group Board also held its annual Strategic Seminar in March, where the Group Board reviewed progress against the current year's strategic priorities and discussed the priorities for 2024/25, which will be brought for approval by Group Board in the summer term.

5c) Student Member Update

The student board member informed the board that he is continuing to gather student feedback and work with the Student Union on the three key student issues of loneliness, wellbeing and communication. A survey regarding student loneliness has been carried out which yielded some useful suggestions for ways to combat this including organising trips and lunchtime activities. The board also heard that the Student Union elections and NSS have both opened with students being encouraged to participate. Although still early in the survey period, it was reported that the NSS response rate was 46% at the date of the meeting, which was slightly lower than this time last year, though it was expected this would increase to around the same level or higher than previous year by the close of the survey.

5d) Link Governor Feedback

The Link Governor for Curriculum Development and Innovation gave a report on an introductory meeting held with the Associate Dean at the beginning of March, to discuss the key dates for the curriculum review and how this will be reported back to the board. It was reported that the project is progressing well, though it was noted that it will involve a lot of change being implemented within a limited timeframe. A full summary of the discussions held in the meeting is available in VBR and a Deep Dive presentation into the curriculum review was held under item 8 on this agenda.

6. Higher Education Code of Good Governance and Board Effectiveness

The Governance Manager explained that, as part of the annual review of board effectiveness, a detailed analysis of the board's compliance with the elements set out in the Committee of University Chairs' Code of Good Governance had been carried out. This self-assessment would also be included as evidence in an internal audit into compliance against the code at both UCLeeds and Leeds Conservatoire. The self-assessment looked at governance arrangements for both the Group and UCLeeds boards and the board was informed that this had shown these are compliant with the code overall, with strong supporting evidence available for each element.

Board members noted that there were four recommended actions identified to strengthen compliance with the code for UCLeeds related to improving the information available on the website, reviewing the way in which the board receives assurance regarding IT resources, aligning the Terms of Reference for Academic Board and the UCLeeds Board and ensuring the board understands its responsibilities in relation to the new freedom of speech legislation. The Governance Manager explained that the self-assessment had identified one element of non-compliance regarding the appointment of a Senior Independent Governor. However, board members were assured that this relates to a suggested aspect of the code, rather than a statutory area. Consideration as to whether a Senior Independent Governor be appointed will be taken forward by the Group Governance and Nominations Committee.

RESOLVED: That the board approve the recommended actions as set out within the report and that that ongoing board effectiveness be monitored through individual review meetings with the Chair on a rolling basis as board members reach 12 months of membership.

PART 2 – STRATEGY, POLICY AND RISK MANAGEMENT

7. Strategic Deep Dive: Curriculum Review

The Associate Dean presented an overview of the rationale for, progress with and timescales for the curriculum development project currently underway at UCLeeds. The board heard that UCLeeds currently has a mixture of provision spread across five departments. Recruitment across these departments has been mixed but has resulted in an overall decline in student numbers for the last three years. In response to the data, board members questioned how far challenges with marketing may have contributed to the struggle with recruitment. It was explained that the decline is likely the result of a combination of marketing, increased sector competition and the need for curriculum review as although recruitment is a challenge across the college based higher education sector, those aspects of the UCLeeds curriculum which relate to specialist provision generally recruit well. It was agreed that there is also a need to address perceptions of UCLeeds as a second choice in order to increase conversion from application to enrolment and to continue to recruit in an increasingly competitive market.

In order to address the decline in recruitment, it was explained that a five strand curriculum development plan has been created with the aim of developing new and strengthening existing partnerships with key employers to ensure the UCLeeds curriculum is current and responsive to sector needs. The curriculum development project is focussed on growth across all elements of the provision, including those based at Harrogate and Keighley colleges and will look to reshape the curriculum to ensure this is aligned to local skills

needs. The board heard that as well as developing a modular approach for Higher Technical Qualifications to meet the requirements of the Lifelong Learning Entitlement, and building further degree apprenticeships, the project will also focus on industrial upskilling of staff to ensure they are ready to deliver courses which meet the needs of businesses. A six phase implementation plan has been developed for the project and the board was informed that UCLeeds is currently in phase three, the 'intention' phase, with staff being asked to put forward their proposals for changes to their portfolios with a deadline of May 2024, so that these can be validated and marketed for a September 2025 start.

The board discussed the increased competition from other institutions within Leeds, which adds pressure to recruitment and impacts on conversion from application to enrolment. It was explained that in an increasingly competitive HE market, UCLeeds is often being put as second choice on applications, therefore the focus of the curriculum development project is to identify and enhance the niche areas of provision in which UCLeeds performs well and does not face as much competition. The board also agreed that further work is needed to market UCLeeds and increase brand awareness and it was emphasised that the new building at Mabgate presents an opportunity for this. Consideration should be given as to whether the brand retains a clear link with Leeds City College. The board was assured that work is being undertaken to identify areas of professional qualifications that can also be developed within the curriculum and that the network building that has taken place as part of this curriculum development project has facilitated this. However, it was noted that further work is needed to ensure these are pitched correctly before they can be fully realised. In conclusion, the board noted the significant progress that has already been made in the curriculum review and were assured that further updates on progress would be brought back to the board in due course and monitored through the Link Governor for Curriculum Development & Innovation.

8. Dean's Report

a) UCLeeds Activity Update

The Dean presented the report and drew the board's attention in particular to the update on the application for Degree Awarding Powers, which had been submitted in January. It was explained that, since the production of the report the following list of additional evidence required by the OfS had been received:

- The links between the Academic Board and UCLeeds Board
- Plans for international recruitment
- Plans for subcontracting arrangements
- Further examples of student consultation leading to change
- Additional examples of course validation
- Examples of student work which demonstrate the application of regulations
- Greater understanding of the student experience on shared modules
- Greater understanding of how resources for student support will be managed as UCLeeds grows.

Board members were assured by the kind and level of detail of evidence requested and were pleased to hear that UCLeeds had been well prepared with an additional bank of evidence to send in anticipation of this request, enabling evidence to be shared within the two week window required. The board thanked the Dean for the report and noted that this demonstrated the amount of positive activity worth celebrating at UCLeeds.

b) Review of UCLeeds Risk Register

The board heard that the risk register has now been mapped to the UCLeeds Strategic Priorities and that the risk related to the SITS project has been linked to the UCLeeds risk register, while also being escalated to a Group level risk. A new risk related to UCLeeds ability to make rapid improvements to its professional programmes prior to an anticipated Ofsted inspection had also been added to the risk register. It was hoped that risk FB16003

related to failure to achieve Degree Awarding Powers and risk FB160012 related to the implementation of the new VLE will be able to be removed this year as activity progresses in both of those areas. The board was assured that the VLE is the focus of UCLeeds peer review this year to look in detail at its use to support curriculum, students and external examiners and how it can be used in the future to provide distance learning programmes.

RESOLVED: That the board approve the latest iteration of the risk register, including the addition of risk FB1600-15 relating to improvements to professional programmes.

9. Update on Mabgate Development

The Group Vice Principal Development informed the board that work began on site with GMI Construction in early November. The planned overall spend on the project is £19.5m, of which £16.3m is grant funded. The board heard that there have been some delays to progress with the Enfield Centre section of the site due to the discovery of additional asbestos in the Studio 24 building which was not picked up in site surveys. The board discussed whether this would delay the completion of the new building and members were assured that this will impact more on the Enfield Centre building rather than the new College House building and that the group is doing all it can to mitigate the impact of this, with the overall target completion date still on track for August/September 2025. The board also noted that the group intends to retain ownership of the current Enfield and College House buildings which mitigates some of the logistical risks should there be any delays.

The board heard that the group is in the process of appointing an architectural firm to develop a master plan for Mabgate as a site for adult learners incorporating additional outdoor space and to develop a new building for Leeds Conservatoire. It was agreed that the board should hold its June meeting at Mabgate

PART 3 – PERFORMANCE MONITORING AND SCRUTINY

10. Financial Performance

a) Financial Position and Forecast 2023/24

The Head of Finance Business Partnering explained that the EBITDA position for UCLeeds at the end of January 2024 of (£1,131k) represents an adverse performance against the year-to-date budget. This is the net result of income being below budget by £1,512k, due predominantly to lower than targeted recruitment combined with an overspend of £50k against expenditure. There are some savings on staff costs due to lower than budgeted staffing levels but this is offset by increased servicing costs. The board noted that income in the Q2 forecast is £1,449k lower than budget, again due primarily to lower than target student recruitment, which is an ongoing challenge for UCLeeds.

b) 2024/25 Budget Assumptions

The board reviewed the report, which outlined the major budget assumptions for the group as a whole in setting the budget for 2024/25, as well as those assumptions specific to UCLeeds. It was noted that, while UCLeeds has increased its fees, the cap on Home/EU fees limits the ability of UCLeeds to continue to grow its income. The board was informed that the assumptions regarding staffing take account of staff having incremental increases, the anticipated staff pay award and the increased employer contributions to the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS). Clarification was given that a vacancy factor is also built in when setting the budget. The board questioned how the financial performance of individual departments is factored into the curriculum review and when setting the budget and assurance was given that this is considered as part of the business planning process.

11. Student Recruitment and Marketing

The Interim Group Director of Marketing and Communications presented the report, which provided student recruitment data as at 1 February 2024. It was explained that, while

applications appear to be down on last year, there is some important context in terms of progression for Foundation Degree Students, removal of a number of Level 4 programmes this year and expected later applications for Teacher Ed programmes, which impact on recruitment figures. It was emphasized that if the 73 programmes not being offered this year are removed, the overall application numbers represent a 3% increase on last year. The board heard that challenges with the implementation of the new HE Student Information System, SITS, has created difficulties with offer making, meaning UCLeeds is behind on this, but assurance was given that these challenges are being worked through to ensure staff have the knowledge and access to SITS to process applications.

The board was reminded that the HE Marketing Strategy was approved in November 2023, which includes a mapped out plan for increasing conversion including enhanced automated email communications and opportunities for applicants to engage with UCLeeds. However, it was agreed that there is still more than can be done to engage applicants throughout the process and increase conversion. The board expressed concern regarding the delays in processing offers, as speed of turn around is often key to getting acceptances. The potential impact of delays in offer making was acknowledged and assurance was given that the team has worked to improve this so that the turn around rate for applications is now back to a normal level.

The board discussed the marketing strategy, which was approved by the board in November. It was felt that, while the strategy sets out a clear plan for internal progression, applicant engagement and international recruitment, there is a need to enhance this strategy to include aspects related to brand development, brand positioning, employer engagement and developing applications from key audiences such as mature students. The board agreed that these were important areas for consideration for UCLeeds and noted that these were also the key themes that had been discussed at the World Café and Board Away Day earlier in the year and the overall UCLeeds Strategy, which is focused on skills and Higher Technical Qualifications. Assurance was given that the skills agenda and internal progression and priorities being worked towards internally, but it was acknowledged that this should be reflected more clearly in the strategy.

The board suggested that there is a need to explore the brand recognition and marketing of UCLeeds more widely, looking at the name and perceptions of UCLeeds. The board agreed that the development of the new building at Mabgate made it timely to also look at the UCLeeds brand more widely. The link governor for Curriculum Development and Innovation explained that she has previously carried out some research into College Based HE nomenclature, which she agreed to share with the Director of Student Recruitment and Marketing outside of the meeting. It was agreed that a further discussion regarding brand development, employer engagement and developing marketing for key audiences not currently reflected in the strategy should be brought back for discussion at the next meeting.

12. Quality of Education

The Dean of HE presented the report, noting that retention continues to be high across all areas of provision, including non-prescribed HE, demonstrating the impact of management interventions and student support mechanism. The board heard that work is being carried out to gather data to support graduate outcomes as this was one of the areas UCLeeds scored lowest in in the TEF and to understand dips in attendance for apprenticeships, professional programmes and non-prescribed. UCLeeds is also looking at workload management support for trainee teachers and establishing lead mentors to build on recommendation from last year's ITT Ofsted report and address issues of non-continuation in PGCE programmes. It was reported that UCLeeds has seen quite a low response rate to the induction survey and a slight drop in satisfaction in the semester one surveys, particularly relating to support for students returning for a second a year and analysis is being carried out to understand the reasons for these results.

13. Update on Implementation of HE Student Information System

The Director of HE Quality and Standards informed the board that there have been a number of challenges with the implementation of the new HE SIS meaning that the project continues to be rated as red, largely due to capacity for the implementation. A number of recommendations have been taken from the project board for additional staff recruitment, although there have been challenges in recruiting to some of the more specialist roles. This had been mitigated through continuation of consultancies, changes to some roles and engaging in a traineeship with Tribal. The board heard that a proposal has been put forward by ITSS to try and resolve some of the integration issues that have been experienced with the implementation of SITS to date. Knowledge exchange and capacity of staff to deliver training was also highlighted as a risk by the project board and assurance was given that this is being addressed through the staff recruitments that are ongoing. Due to the challenges with implementation it was explained that the project team have explored the potential impact of delaying the Go Live date by a year. It was felt that the main risk of delaying Go Live would be the significant additional costs in terms of staff and Tribal support as well as the impact on staff morale and the risk of staff turnover as a result of this. Delaying by a year may also exacerbate integration issues and challenges with legacy systems and to mitigate these may require further descoping.

The board discussed the potential risks around going live as planned, which may mean the quality and level of testing of the system is not to level desired and this may have a negative impact on the student experience. The level of testing required is the biggest risk for the project as the amount mapped by Tribal far exceeds capacity, therefore a minimum acceptable standard of testing is being mapped in order to ensure the system can go live as planned. It was noted that the Principal of Leeds Conservatoire is the project sponsor and is meeting with Tribal on a weekly basis to monitor progress. Overall, the board noted the significant risks with the project but were pleased to hear that the risk score is beginning to reduce and commended the resilience of staff working on the project.

14. EDI Annual Assurance Report 2022/23

The board noted that the EDI Annual Assurance Report demonstrated the very strong EDI performance for UCLeeds and the good cross-group initiatives that are being worked on.

15. Mid-Year Assurance Reporting

The board received and noted mid-year assurance reports relating to Disability Support, Health and Safety and People Services.

The meeting closed at 6.56pm

Signed: (Chair) Date: