

## LUMINATE EDUCATION GROUP

### MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE UNIVERSITY CENTRE LEEDS BOARD HELD ON MONDAY 24 MARCH 2025

#### **Present**

Colin Booth	Group CEO and Governor
Charlotte Catmull	Staff Board Member
Brian Culleton	Co-optee
June Dennis	Co-optee
Katie Miller	Co-optee
Rod Peet (Acting Chair)	Co-optee

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

#### **In Attendance**

Pete Fiaschi (item 10b)	Director of International Recruitment
Rebecca Fores	Dean of HE
Eleanor Harris	Governance Manager
Bill Jones	Deputy CEO and Executive Principal
Helen King	Group Director of Student Recruitment and Marketing
Gemma Simmons-Blench	Deputy CEO, Curriculum & Quality
Joanne Tyssen	Director of HE Quality and Standards
Paul Ward (from item 10)	Group Head of Finance Business Partnering
David Warren	Group Vice Principal Development
Joe Wilson	Principal, Leeds Conservatoire

The meeting started at 4.00pm and was held via MS Teams.

### **PART 1 - MEETING ADMINISTRATION AND GOVERNANCE**

#### **1. Welcome and Apologies for Absence**

The Governance Manager informed the board that Mark Garratt had resigned from his position as Luminate Governor and Chair of the UC Leeds Board. In accordance with the Terms of Reference, the board chose Rod Peet to Chair the meeting. The process of electing a new Chair would be taken forward by the Director of Governance. Apologies for absence were recorded from Aisha Ali, Javaad Alipoor and Allison Mortimer.

#### **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 25 November 2024 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

complete or due for completion at a later date. The UC Leeds Board Away Day had been postponed due to the full Ofsted inspection and would therefore be rearranged.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the board held on 25 November 2024 be approved as a true and accurate record and that these be signed by the Chair.

## **5. Communications**

### **5a) Update from Chair including feedback from Group Board, World Café and Strategic Seminar**

The Group CEO updated the board on the discussions and key decisions from the Group Board meeting in December, which included the approval of the 2023/24 financial statements, several HR policies, the acquisition of Livingstone House and a preferred bidder for the Colle House disposal. The CEO explained that Livingstone House would be used to accommodate the growing need for post-16 teaching space in Leeds.

At the World Café in January, discussions commenced regarding the refreshed Group Strategy. Following this, at the Strategic Seminar in March, the Group Board reaffirmed Luminate's values, its educational character and commitment to inclusive education.

### **5b) Link Governor Feedback**

The Chair reported the Link Governor activity that had taken place since the last meeting including; an introductory meeting between the Marketing Link Governor and the new Group Director of Student Recruitment and Marketing, the Access and Participation Link Governor had been invited to attend the next Access and Participation Committee meeting in May, the Safeguarding Link Governor had attended a webinar regarding governance and safeguarding for charities, hosted by Stone King and the Supportive Workforce Link Governor had held an initial meeting with the Dean of HE regarding the remit of the role.

## **6. Appointment of Vice Chair**

The Governance Manager reported that following a request for Vice Chair nominations circulated to the board in December, one nomination was received from June Dennis.

RESOLVED: That the board approve the appointment of June Dennis as Vice Chair of the board for the remainder of her term as co-opted member.

## **7. Outcome of Effectiveness Reviews**

The Governance Manager summarised the outcomes of the effectiveness review meetings held throughout February and March. The board heard that overall, members agreed that the board was operating effectively and in accordance with its Terms of Reference. Several actions were recommended to continue to enhance the board's effectiveness, including continuing to strengthen the Link Governor scheme with a more formalised schedule of meetings arranged by the Governance Team and informal visits to meet with staff and students, clearer links between board members and curriculum areas, increased communications between meetings and refresher financial training.

The board noted that Brian Culleton had taken on the role of Safeguarding Link Governor and would be the link for apprenticeships, Charlotte Catmull the Supportive Workforce Link Governor and Katie Miller the Graduate Outcomes Link Governor. Board members were reminded that any visits to UC Leeds could be arranged directly with the Dean of HE or through the Governance Team.

While it was reported that the breadth of skills on the board was generally felt to be very strong, board members supported the suggestion that additional members be recruited with digital or legal teach and healthcare experience.

RESOLVED: That the board approved the actions recommended resulting from the effectiveness reviews.

## **PART 2 – STRATEGY, POLICY AND RISK MANAGEMENT**

### **8. Strategic Deep Dive: UC Leeds Campus Move**

The Dean of HE presented an overview of floor plans and the way in which the different teaching spaces would be used in the new building at Mabgate. The board heard that the entire Mabgate site would house the group's adult provision including HE, access and the provision currently offered at the Enfield Centre, with cross campus communal spaces intended to create an inclusive experience and culture celebrating the diversity of the adult learners in the group, which would be embedded through campus wide festivals and collaborative activities.

The Group Vice Principal Development explained that the external work in the building was complete and when finished would be BREAM excellent rated, including a connection to the District Heat Network (DHN) for hot water supply. It was reported that handover had originally been scheduled for 1 September, however, due to an issue with the connection to the DHN it was likely that formal handover would be delayed by two to four weeks. While this was not confirmed, the board noted this could present a risk to teaching delivery, which was due to start on 22 September. Assurance was given that the group was working towards still meeting the 22 September start date for delivery and that a communications plan was being developed to ensure students were aware of the planned occupation date. It was agreed that this communications plan would be shared with board members when available.

Board members were assured that the group was working closely with the contractors to secure formal handover as soon as possible and preparing for any changes needed to the academic calendar. However, member advised that the group should exercise caution and be prepared for additional delays caused by snagging and internal fit out or connection issues such as with Wi-Fi. Board members reiterated their availability for advice based on their own experience of similar major building projects.

### **9. Dean's Report**

#### **a) UCLeeds Activity Update & Strategic Plan 2023-2026 – Progress Update**

The Dean of HE presented an update regarding activity at UC Leeds and progress with the 2023-2026 strategic priorities since the last meeting. The board heard that the institutional restructure was progressing and, following a reduction from five departments to three, consultation had begun on a staffing restructure to remove 10 posts within curriculum areas at various levels. It was anticipated that these changes would reduce costs by over £500k, providing greater financial stability for UC Leeds in the future. Restructure proposals were based on departmental and curriculum requirements, ensuring that the student body would not be negatively impacted by the removal of roles. Board members discussed the reasoning for the restructure heard that a combination of the cumulative decline in student numbers over the last three to four years along with the removal of some UC Leeds provision to LCC, which has resulted in some areas of provision being over staffed, necessitated efficiencies in staffing.

It was reported that HE student recruitment continued to be a strategic priority for the group and that, internally, UC Leeds was working with budget holders across the group's FE colleges to increase internal progression, including developing a progression booklet to identify pathways for students. This would be shared with the board when published. The student recruitment and marketing team were also creating internal advertising around the colleges to increase awareness of the UC Leeds offer.

Board members were informed that the Curriculum Development Project was continuing to progress at a rapid pace, including preparations for modular provision once the Lifelong Learning Entitlement came into effect. Board members expressed concern that such a large and rapidly progressing change project created a high level of risk and were assured the UC Leeds leadership was working with the Change Team to mitigate internal risks.

#### **b) Mid-Year Assurance AAA**

The board noted mid-year assurance reports related to Safeguarding, Disability Support, Health & Safety and HR & OD. With regard to safeguarding, the board was informed that, sadly, a student studying on UC Leeds Level 4 Healthcare programme had passed away. The board extended their condolences to the student's friends and family and were assured that UC Leeds had support in place to help students affected by the death.

#### **c) Review of UC Leeds Risk Register 2024/25**

The Dean of HE presented the updated risk register to the board, which recommended the addition of three new risks. Risk reference UCS0002 related to the potential delays to the occupation of the new building at Mabgate, risk reference UCS0018 related to monitoring of occupation standards due to changes impacting leading provision in areas such as health and risk reference UCS0019 related to curriculum portfolio development, due to the pace of change and risk to recruitment regarding pathway decisions and employer requirements.

The board heard that it was also proposed to remove risk reference UCS0012 related to apprenticeship recruitment in science as it was encompassed within the overarching student recruitment risk UCS0004 and to remove risk UCS0011 related to implementation of the Blackboard VLE as this had been successfully implemented.

RESOLVED: That the board approve updates to the risk register including the addition of three risks and removal of two risks as outlined above.

### **10. Student Recruitment & Marketing**

#### **a) Student Recruitment & Marketing Update**

The Group Director of Student Recruitment and Marketing provided the board with current recruitment figures for UC Leeds, explaining that total applications were up 29% compared to the same point last year, with offers up 90%. Regarding international recruitment, the board heard that 49 applications had been received with seven offers made, conditional on the students passing IELTS. The board queried the low number of international offers compared to applications and heard that the remaining applicants had either not supplied all the information needed to make an offer, been rejected because they didn't meet the requirements or withdrawn. The board also noted that it was not possible to benchmark how many offers would need to convert to meet international recruitment targets given the lack of data in this area for the first year of recruitment, but it was intended to have this data for future years.

The board was pleased to note the continued focus on internal progression through increased marketing and progression targets for curriculum teams, though more work to help understand the UC Leeds offer was needed in some areas. The board also heard that open days were scheduled throughout the spring term and members questioned whether it would be beneficial to hold an open day in one of the other teaching spaces at Mabgate so that potential students could see the location of the new building. It was explained that this may not be logistically possible due to building works, but images, videos and virtual tours would be used a promotional material once available.

The board noted an ongoing risk regarding marketing of new courses, which could not be advertised as both two-year plus top up and three-year courses at the same time. The board was assured that the Marketing team was working with UC Leeds management,

using the validation schedule to understand the right models and audience, to identify the best marketing strategy for each programme.

#### **b) International Recruitment Update**

The Director of International Student Recruitment presented an update on international recruitment activity since the last meeting. The board heard that all applications received so far had been direct applications without the support of agents and, although the process of signing agents was taking longer than expected, once secured a greater number of stronger applications with a better conversion rate was expected. The board queried whether there was a risk that too many applications for the limited number of CAS's available would have a negative impact on relationships with agents. However, the board was assured that for a new institution a larger number of agents would be required to ensure enough publicity in the markets being used.

The board was advised that very positive feedback had been received so far from agents but that competition for international recruitment in these markets was strong, with aggressive tactics being employed, such as large scholarships. The board was pleased to hear that Luminate's status as a new recruiter had not negatively impacted engagement. However, members were informed that the inability to offer post-study work visas, which would not be granted until after four cycles of inspection, did present a challenge. Board members questioned whether these factors would impact the quality of agents available and were assured that only trusted agents already experienced in sending students to UK institutions would be used.

The board sought assurance that qualifications were being appropriately verified to ensure compliance with UKVI requirements. Assurance was given that the admissions team employed rigorous checks to qualifications and that members of the team were already experienced in this process through work at Leeds Conservatoire.

### **11. Amendment to HE Fees & Refunds Policy**

The Director of HE Quality and Standards outlined the proposed changes to the HE Fees and Refunds policy, which would return payments to a three instalment plan for self-funded students and formalise scholarships being offered as fee waivers, particularly for international students. The board agreed that the return to a three instalment payment plan was in line with the process used by other institutions, mirrored the process used at Leeds Conservatoire and provided clearer dates for when payments were expected for students. This would also support the finance team when planning income.

The board heard that the four types of scholarships in the form of fee waivers were proposed, which would formalise the ad hoc waivers already being granted. Clarification was given that this would not remove the flexibility to vary fee waivers by exception in extenuating circumstances and that these fee waivers were separate to the internal progression bursary also offered.

RESOLVED: That the board recommend that Group Board approve the amendment to the HE Fees and Refunds Policy.

## **PART 3 – PERFORMANCE MONITORING AND SCRUTINY**

### **12. Financial Performance**

#### **a) Financial Position & Forecast 2024/25**

The Head of Finance Business Partnering presented the year to date financial position for UC Leeds as at 31 January 2025, noting the overall EBITDA position was -30.7% compared to a budgeted position of -1.3%, due primarily to lower than budget tuition fees arising from lower than planned student recruitment. This had been offset slightly by a small

amount of additional income from training delivered, lower than planned staff costs due to managed vacancies and reduced operating costs. It was explained that some improvements to AEB and apprenticeship income were expected at Q3, however, the impact of reduced income from tuition fees would continue to create deficit in the budget.

Board members questioned whether the cost of the reorganisation had been factored into the budget and were assured that Luminate policy to meet any redundancy costs at group level, meaning the only impact was likely to be an improvement on the financial position.

#### **b) Operating Budget Assumptions**

The Head of Finance Business Partnering presented the report which provided a high level explanation of the assumptions taken when setting the operating budget for 2025/26 both at Group and UC Leeds level. The largest assumption for UC Leeds next year was the impact that the increase in fees would have on income. It was noted that the group was considering a longer term to business planning, which would be particularly beneficial where new three year programmes were planned at UC Leeds.

### **13. UC Leeds Annual Review**

The Dean of Students presented the highlights from the UC Leeds Annual Review for 2023/24, which outlined the key successes, actions and performance data for the previous year, providing assurance regarding the way in which UC Leeds monitored compliance with B3 conditions of registration. The board noted the success of the 2023/24 research festival, which was planned to be repeated in 2024/25.

The board heard that cases of academic misconduct related to use of AI continued to be an issue in 2023/24, with more cases reaching formal stage in part due to changes in regulations. As a result, the board was informed that the process has been updated again to allow for penalties which incorporate the use of AI. The board was assured that this was a focus within the group and would be the focus of the 2024/25 Peer Review.

### **14. Quality of Education Report**

The Group Director of HE Quality & Standards presented the report, explaining that this provided a picture of in-year progress against conditions of registration for the year to date. The board noted that retention was strong, at 99% for HE programmes and apprenticeships and 86% for professional programmes and non-prescribed HE, all of which were above the total retention figures for 2023/24. The board heard that mid-year pre-boards held in early March had demonstrated strong levels of achievement in Fd Healthcare Play Specialism and Creative Hair and Media Make Up. However, Fd Art had presented with a large number of resits again, which were being investigated so that mitigating actions could be put in place. Additionally, it was reported that since the report had been submitted a review would be conducted regarding resits and non-submissions as a pattern in Sport.

It was also noted that attendance levels on HE programmes had dipped, leading to a review of the attendance policy to understand reasons for non-attendance, barriers that students may be facing and explore the definition of positive engagement.

## **PART 4 – ASSURANCE REPORTING**

### **15. Annual Assurance Reports**

The board noted annual assurance reports related to HR & OD and EDI

The meeting closed at 6.44pm

Signed: ..... (Chair) Date: .....