

LUMINATE EDUCATION GROUP

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE UNIVERSITY CENTRE LEEDS BOARD HELD ON MONDAY 27 MARCH 2023

Present

Colin Booth	Group CEO
Mark Garratt (Chair)	Governor
Cameron Lee	Student member
Katie Miller	Co-optee
David Tipple	Staff member

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

In Attendance

Rebecca Fores	Associate Dean
Melanie Halstead	Director of Governance
Eleanor Harris	Governance Manager
Bill Jones	Deputy CEO and Executive Principal
Anna Keogh (Items 1 – 7)	Director of Student Recruitment and Marketing (Leeds Conservatoire)
Sarah Marquez	Interim Dean of HE
Gemma Simmons-Blench (from item 6)	Deputy CEO, Curriculum & Quality
Joanne Tyssen	Head of HE Quality and Student Support
Paul Ward	Group Head of Business Partnering

The meeting took place via Microsoft Teams and started at 5.30pm.

PART 1 - MEETING ADMINISTRATION AND GOVERNANCE

1. Welcome and Apologies for Absence

The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting and introduced David Tipple, who had joined the board as the staff board member. Apologies for absence were recorded from Joe Wilson, Principal (Leeds Conservatoire), Aisha Ali-Khan (Co-optee) and Javaad Alipoor (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.

4. Minutes of the Meeting of the Board held on 7 November 2022 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 both actions on the action log are due to be brought back to a future board meeting.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the board held on 7 November 2022 be approved as a true and accurate record and that these be signed by the Chair.

5. Communications

5a) Chair's Communications

The Chair informed the board that four new board members had been approved by the Group Board, subject to interview. The Chair reported that interviews with two of the nominees had taken place and confirmed that Aisha Ali-Khan and Javaad Alipoor had been appointed as co-opted members of the board, with immediate effect. Both Aisha and Javaad would be attending the June board meeting and it was hoped that interviews with the remaining nominees would be held in time to allow them to also join the board in June. It was explained that additional vacancies to ensure a broad skill set (such as a member with financial expertise) would be advertised through social media and it was anticipated that the board would be up to full membership by the new academic year.

5b) SU Officer's Update

The student board member reported that a recent issue with the size of the prayer room had been resolved quickly by making a nearby classroom available as an additional space for this purpose. The Interim Dean of HE thanked the student board member for his contribution to the student submission for the TEF, which was an optional submission that had taken a lot of work to complete, but was greatly valued. Members were informed that the Student Union elections had taken place and a new HE Officer had been elected, who would be in post from the end of June.

5c) Office for Students (OfS) Communications

The Interim Dean of HE reported that, following the cessation of the QAA as the designated quality body for the HE sector, the role would be picked up by the OfS and a release regarding any changes that would be implemented was anticipated this month. The board discussed the application for degree awarding powers and heard that it was hoped the application could be submitted after Easter, although a decision as to whether to apply for DAP or TDAP had not yet been made. In addition, a decision would need to be taken as to how to brand degree certificates, once degree awarding powers have been obtained. The board agreed that a discussion regarding branding for the University Centre should be brought back to the next meeting.

Board members were informed that the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) had now been opened up to HE programmes, allowing institutions to offer smaller, modular programmes to adult learners. The details of which programmes and how were still be worked through, however, it was expected that these would initially be opened up to modules on Higher Technical Qualifications and would be used both to offer modular degrees and to enable CPD and skills updating. It was felt that this would help UCL to grow its employer led curriculum, although the board acknowledged that modules would need to be reviewed to ensure they are fit for this purpose.

4d) Feedback from the Group World Café Event

The Group World Café event took place on Friday 3 February and was attended by board and committee representatives from across the group, including University Centre. The board heard that this was a positive and productive session, which demonstrated strong collaboration between board members and a shared understanding of the strategic aims for the group. The Group CEO informed the board that the refreshed Group Strategy would be brought to the board for review in June.

PART 2 – STRATEGY, POLICY AND RISK MANAGEMENT

6. University Centre Leeds (UCL) Strategy

The Associate Dean presented the draft 2023-26 strategy for the University Centre, which had been refreshed following consultation with all Heads of Department. The refreshed strategy had been developed with the core values that drive the institution at its centre and set strategic aims in line with these values.

The board discussed the aims highlighted within the strategic plan and queried whether aim PE5, to grow student enrolment numbers by 200 year on year was a realistic target. Assurance was given that this target had been developed with the intention to be both realistic regarding growth while ensuring the Heads of Department felt able to take risks to encourage new students to come to UCL and to find flexible methods of delivery to accommodate this growth and meet student needs. The board questioned whether greater emphasis should be placed on the importance of employer engagement within the strategy, giving the increasing importance of this across the sector and it was agreed that this work exists in practice and should be reflected as a strategic aim. The board also agreed that the wording of the sustainability strategic priority should be simplified to reflect the highest priorities, as it was currently too broad, trying to encompass environmental sustainability, sustainability of workforce and financial sustainability all under the same heading. It was also noted that the UCL strategic priorities within the Group SODP for next year will need to reflect those articulated within the UCL strategy.

RESOLVED: That, subject to the considerations highlighted above, the board approve the draft University Centre Leeds Strategy 2023-26.

7. Student Recruitment and Marketing Update

The Director of Student Recruitment & Marketing presented an outline of the focus and future direction of the Marketing Team to the board, explaining that since September 2022 the Leeds Conservatoire Marketing Team had been working to support all HE marketing within the group, including at University Centre, with an initial focus on marketing campaigns. The board heard that this had improved the marketing service for University Centre and created more of a partnership between academic and marketing colleagues. The Director of Student Recruitment & Marketing highlighted a number of changes that have been made, including allowing direct applications through a CRM system to improve the applicant experience. The board heard that initial marketing campaigns had not been as impactful as hoped and it was felt that this may in part be due to the inaccessibility of the current University Centre website. It is therefore planned that the website will be rebuilt by August 2023 to make it more engaging and flexible. The board heard that the same coding and developer are being used as for the conservatoire website, which was recently rebuilt, which is another example of the way in which collaborative working across the institutions can save costs.

The board discussed the branding of the University Centre, which would be key for improving recruitment and agreed that the close association with Leeds City College is a strength for the University Centre and should be built upon. The board noted that a key market for UCL is school leavers, and a closer association with Leeds City College would also therefore help school leaver recruitment as well as internal progression from the college itself, which is currently low. The board concluded the discussion by noting that any future marketing campaign or rebranding will need to be innovative and engaging, making the most of the institution's key selling points and taking the outcomes of perception surveys into account.

8. Group HE Student Information System (SIS) Update

The Head of Quality and Student Support provided the board with an update on progress with the development and implementation of the new HE SIS, explaining that this is broadly on track, with the release 1 design phase currently awaiting sign off from Tribal. The board heard that there had been an issue with server capacity, which needed to be upgraded to support the system environments, creating a short delay and an additional £60k charge. While the project remained on track, the board was informed that access to the live testing environment had been challenging as only 10 licenses had been purchased, most of which were being used by Leeds Conservatoire meaning not all UCL staff who require access to the testing environment are currently able to use it. Options are being explored to either purchase more licenses or redistribute these. In addition, staff capacity was also flagged as

a risk both due to delays in recruiting to MIS posts and due to the significant time commitment required from staff from within the UCL Registry Team involved in implementation, alongside their day jobs.

Assurance was given that, in spite of the challenges in implementation, staff remain positive about the project and can see the benefits that the new system will bring once it is implemented. However, the board requested that this be added as a risk on the UCL risk register and a further progress update be brought back in June.

9. Review of UCL Risk Register

The board reviewed the risk register, noting that an additional cause had been added to risk FB16001 relating to the impact of the cost of living crisis on recruitment and attendance. It was noted that, in relation to risk FB16003 regarding obtaining degree awarding powers, delays in the implementation of the Learning on Demand system has impacted on the ability to complete the embedding of requirements in staff KPIs. The board agreed that, should NSS results continue to be high this year, risk FB16006 could be removed from the risk register. This would be reviewed at the first meeting of the next academic year.

RESOLVED: That the board approve the updates to the UCL risk register

PART 3 – PERFORMANCE MONITORING AND SCRUTINY

10. UCL Annual Review 2021/22

The Interim Dean HE presented the report, and drew the board's attention to the retention figures, which had remained fairly steady overall, with slight increases at level 0 and 6 and slight decreases at levels 5 and 7. The board heard that retention at level 4 has not recovered to pre-Covid levels and students joining at level 4 are requiring significantly more support which is also impacting on achievement. It was explained that achievement at level 6 was also adversely impacted by an academic misconduct case, which saw a significant number of students investigated and then subsequently fail to complete their studies.

The board heard that an increasing number of students are declaring mental health difficulties, but conversely, engagement with student support has decreased. It had therefore been decided to move back to face to face enrolments at level 4 in order to raise awareness of and build engagement with these services.

It was reported that the number of students achieving a first class honours degree is lower than the HESA average, however, students joining UCL often enter with very low achievement at level 3 or are mature students who have been out of education for some time, meaning the distance travelled to attain their degree is significant. It was explained that the Graduate Outcomes data in the report is lagged by a year and relates to the cohort graduating in 2020/21. The increase in unemployment for this group could therefore be an impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, however, it was also of note that a higher proportion of those in work were in graduate level jobs.

The board discussed the rise in academic misconduct cases reported in 2021/22, and noted that this largely related to a localised issue in the Business and Leadership department, where it was identified that students had been using an AI tool to write assignments. The board was informed that this was becoming a sector wide issue and assurance was given that active steps are being taken to try and educate students around the issues with using these tools, create training for staff and improve the identification for causes for concern in this area.

11. Mid-Year Monitoring Report for 2022/23

The board commended the UCL team on the outcome of the Initial Teacher Training Ofsted inspection, the full report for which had now been published. It was confirmed that UCL was

the only institution in Yorkshire, Humber and the North East to have achieved a ‘good’ rating, and UCL had been cited as having the potential to become system leaders. Congratulations were also extended to the team for their nominations in seven categories at the Educate North Awards. The board heard that the development of Higher Technical Qualifications continues to progress well, with UCL beginning to be seen as a significant player in this area within the sector. It was explained that the receipt of an additional £150k of Higher Technical Education Skills Injection Funding will further aid this development. The board was assured that retention so far in 2022-23 remains strong and, while a higher number of students are presenting with specific needs, the teams are working hard to ensure these students are supported.

12. Applications Report – 2023 Entry

The board noted that both UCAS and direct applications were up slightly on last year as were firm acceptances. However, it was acknowledged that conversion activities will be key to ensuring these applications convert to enrolments and campaigns are currently being developed.

13. a) Financial Position and Forecast

The Head of Finance Business Partnering presented the actual financial position for the University Centre for the first seven months of the financial year. It was explained that the EBITDA position is below budget by £582k, largely due to the £951k deficit in HE fee income as a result of lower than target in-year recruitment. It was noted that higher than budget expenditure of staff costs and servicing costs are mostly due to the timing of recharges not yet being actioned. Overall the EBITDA position for the Q2 forecast is lower than budget due to lower than target student recruitment and increases in the cost of HE exam and validation fees.

b) Operating Budget Assumptions

The board heard that the first round of business planning has now been completed and budget holders are now completing revised plans based on feedback received. It was explained that the report set out the assumptions used for this budget setting process. Confirmation was given that the business planning process includes the requirement for budget holders to make efficiencies in order to reach budget, which in the case of UCL, has been particularly impacted by the lower than target recruitment this year.

14. Distribution and Monitoring of Luminare Services Costs

The Group CEO presented the report, explaining that this is the first attempt that has been made to separate out the distribution of costs for group services and is therefore a transitional year. It was noted that, overall, service costs for UCL are lower than for other parts of the group, primarily due to the high space utilisation within the University Centre. The Group CEO outlined plans for HE specific services for 2023/24 and the board heard that the three core budget holders for these services have been asked to work together to identify any areas for potential efficiencies or overlap between UCL and Leeds Conservatoire. However, assurance was given that at this stage no presumptions or decisions had been made regarding what these might be. The board heard that further updates relating to staff perceptions on the effectiveness of shared services and a report into the results of a benchmarking exercise to identify value for money in these services will be brought to the June meeting.

The meeting closed at 7.40pm

Signed: (Chair) Date: