

## LUMINATE EDUCATION GROUP

### MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE UNIVERSITY CENTRE LEEDS BOARD HELD ON MONDAY 20 NOVEMBER 2023

#### Present

Aisha Ali	Co-optee
Colin Booth	Group CEO & Governor
June Dennis	Co-optee
Mark Garratt (Chair)	Governor
Reece Longden*	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

Pete Fiaschi (Items 1 – 8)	International Marketing Consultant
Rebecca Fores*	Associate Dean
Melanie Halstead*	Director of Governance
Eleanor Harris	Governance Manager
Sarah Heaton (Item 12)	Head of Learning & Organisational Development
Bill Jones	Deputy CEO and Executive Principal
Anna Keogh (Items 1 – 8)	Director of Student Recruitment and Marketing (Leeds Conservatoire)
Sarah Marquez*	Dean of HE
Steve Navotni (Item 12)	L&OD Business Partner
Gemma Simmons-Blench	Deputy CEO, Curriculum & Quality
Paul Ward*	Group Head of Business Partnering

\* Attended for all items except item 19

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 Reece Longden, the new student board member. Apologies for absence were recorded from Javaad Alipoor (Co-optee), Joanne Tyssen (Group Director HE Quality and Standards) and Joe Wilson (Principal, Leeds Conservatoire).

### 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 26 June 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. Confirmation was given that a final version of the HE Fees and Refunds policy had been approved by the board by email circulation following detailed discussion at the previous meeting.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the board held on 26 June 2023 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**

The Chair informed the board that he had attended the UCLeeds graduations on 11 November and congratulated the team on a very successful and inspiring event. The Chair also updated the board on the discussions and key decisions from the Group Board meetings which had taken place since June. At the July meeting the Group Board reviewed the Gender Pay Gap report for 2023 (mean gap up £0.33, median gap down £0.43) and approved the group strategic priorities and operating budget and three year financial plan. At the September Group Board meeting the board approved additional DfE grant funding for the FEETF project relating to refurbishment works at Park Lane and entering into a loan agreement with the DfE for these projects. The board also approved the lease for the New Vine building for Leeds City College students with complex needs. At the October meeting the board approved the Group Strategy, FE Safeguarding Children and Adults and FE Fees policies and supported the AoC recommended 6.5% pay award for staff. The board also discussed the Group Risk Register where an emerging risk around gang crime/violence had been added. It was explained that there was a possibility that a further risk relating to tensions regarding the situation in Gaza may also be added to the risk register.

##### **5b) Student Member Update**

The student board member updated the board on a number of feedback gathering exercises he had undertaken with students, including with regard to the new Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) - Blackboard, which had been received very positively. Board members questioned whether any issues had been reported by students during this transition and heard that some students had initially had trouble logging in but this had now mostly been rectified.

##### **5c) Office for Students (OfS) Communications**

The Dean of HE updated the board on a number of new pots of funding which UCLeeds has submitted bids for, including for degree apprenticeships and modular allocation funding for the lifelong learning entitlement. The consultation regarding Higher Technical Qualifications closed on 9 November and the board heard that the Dean and Group CEO were having very positive conversations with the OfS regarding this consultation. The OfS had also released a report into grade inflation, which is a concern in the sector though is thought to be improving. Assurance was given that the OfS has found no issues of grade inflation at UCL.

#### **6. Link Governor Arrangements**

The board reviewed the list of Link Governor roles, which are aligned to both the strategic priorities and key areas of statutory compliance. It was acknowledged that the board still has some vacancies and new member recruitment will be carried out with these Link Governor roles in mind, as well as the skills audit of the board.

RESOLVED: That the board approve the following Link Governor roles for 2023/24:

Link Governor Role	Board Member
EDI / Disability Support	Aisha Ali
Safeguarding and Prevent	
Health and Safety	
Access and Participation	Katie Miller
Supportive Workforce	
Curriculum Development and Innovation	June Dennis
Graduate Outcomes and Destinations	
Marketing and Branding	Mark Garratt

## PART 2 – STRATEGY, POLICY AND RISK MANAGEMENT

### 7. University Centre Leeds Marketing Strategy

The Director of Student Recruitment and Marketing presented the proposed strategy for student recruitment at the University Centre for the coming year. It was explained that the SWOT analysis used to inform the strategy is ever evolving and will continue to be updated as the strategy progresses. This analysis has identified that, although it is known that internal progression from within the FE colleges in the group is lower than it should be, there is very little sector data available to benchmark where the group stands in this in comparison to its competitors. Analysis of the trends in applications for the University Centre show that overall conversion from application to enrolment has declined year on year.

Therefore, the board heard that the marketing priorities for UCLeeds for the coming year will focus on improving internal progression from within the group, increasing engagement with applicants to improve conversion, opening up UCLeeds to international applications and increasing the amount of data, research and competitor analysis available. The board discussed the marketing opportunities and challenges that UCLeeds faces, noting that the Lifelong Learning Entitlement and Higher Technical Qualifications are significant opportunities for growth, which should be capitalised on. Board members agreed that there is increasing competition for those students coming from Further Education colleges from other local HE intuitions such as Leeds Trinity University. Therefore, it was agreed that greater brand awareness and competitor analysis is needed to ensure UCLeeds can make the most of its strengths. The board agreed that there is a significant missed opportunity for internal progression from within the FE colleges in the group and suggested it would be useful to have some analysis of internal progression pathways so that staff in the different UCLeeds departments can directly form relationships with corresponding staff in the FE colleges. It was reported that where these relationships exist internal progression is usually much stronger and board members were pleased to hear that this would be a focus of marketing going forward. Overall, the board supported the direction of travel and requested that these marketing priorities and the SWOT analysis continue to be monitored by the board.

RESOLVED: That the board approve the UCL Marketing Strategy 2023-24

### 8. International Recruitment Strategy

The Director of Student Recruitment and Marketing and International Marketing Consultant provided the board with an overview of the international student recruitment landscape and outlined the proposal for developing an international recruitment strategy for the group, including University Centre Leeds. The board heard international recruitment is growing again following the Covid-19 pandemic and this is therefore a potentially valuable income stream for the University Centre. The proposal to invest resource at a group level will assist in building a reputation for UCLeeds in international markets, but marketing will have to be carefully targeted to the most viable areas. The board was informed that recruitment would be carried out using agencies in the major cities of potential recruitment markets, such as India. Pakistan was also identified as a potential recruitment market, though it was noted

that funding changes may make recruitment in South Asia more difficult in general. The board discussed the projected student numbers, noting that these are very small and therefore may not result in a worthwhile investment for UCLeeds. Assurance was given that the proposed investment of approximately £300k spread over two years is a group level resource and will be used to aid international recruitment at UCLeeds, Leeds Conservatoire and Leeds Sixth Form. It is also hoped that recruiting international students for A Level and ESOL courses will create a pipeline into UCL for the future. However, the performance of international recruitment will be monitored over the next two years with the hope that by September 2025 the potential of this as an income stream for UCLeeds will be better understood. Assurance was given that the shared marketing and quality teams across UCLeeds and Leeds Conservatoire will ensure support is available for international students both during the application period and when they arrive.

RESOLVED: That the board support the proposal and agreed to recommend to the Group Board that this be approved.

## **9. UCLeeds Strategic Priorities**

The board agreed that the strategic priorities should form the basis of a deep dive topic at the board away day in February, therefore this item was deferred.

## **10. Dean's Report**

### **a) UCLeeds Activity Update**

The Dean provided the board with an overview of significant activity which has taken place at UCLeeds since the last meeting, including a number of items reported to the Academic Board on 24 October, which had been brought forward to the UCLeeds Board. The board heard that a number of key staffing changes have been made to the UCLeeds leadership team since the last meeting, including the permanent appointment of the Associate Dean and heads of Sport and Health, Law, Leadership and Business and STEM. It was reported that UCLeeds' application for Degree Awarding Powers (DAPs) has been accepted and preparations are underway for the visit and assessment by the OfS. The outcome of the assessment will be reported back to the board. The board was also informed of several projects, which have launched or are underway, including the launch of the new VLE Blackboard, which has been well received by staff and students. The University Centre is also leading on a Local Skills Improvement Plan project on behalf of the group, which is focused on Digital Innovation in FinTech. The proposed plan is to develop FinTech academies across the region with LEG established as a hub.

### **b) Risk Management Annual Report and Review of UCLeeds Risk Register**

The board noted the risk management annual report, which highlighted the changes made to the UCLeeds risk register during 2022/23, including the removal of risk FB16008 relating to working with agents and the addition of risks FB160010, failure to recruit and retain staff, FB160011 implementation of new HE MIS, FB160012 implementation of new student VLE and FB160013 reduction of apprenticeship recruitment in science during the year.

In reviewing the risk register for the current academic year the board focussed in particular on the risks relating to failure to recruit students and failure to recruit staff, both of which have increased due to recruitment challenges this year. Staff recruitment is a sector wide challenge and HR is working with management to mitigate this risk. With regard to student recruitment, the board noted that the marketing strategy presented earlier on the agenda is intended to help mitigate this risk by focussing on internal progression, international recruitment and market insight. The board also noted that the risk related to poor NSS results has been removed from the risk register for 2023/24 as UCLeeds has once again performed well in this area. It was anticipated that risks FB16003, failure to obtain DAPs, FB160012, implementation of new student VLE and FB16003, reduction of

apprenticeship recruitment in science, would be able to be closed by the end of the academic year.

RESOLVED: That the board approve the risk management annual report for 2022/23 and the proposed risk register for 2023/24.

### **c) Quality and Financial Performance Targets**

The board reviewed the quality targets for UCL for 2023/24, noting that the financial targets are currently measured within the Leeds City College targets and will be separated out for 2024/25. Board members noted the proposal to maintain current performance for the 2024/25 NSS target in all areas except learning resources and learning opportunities, which had performed below target this year. However, the board requested that the 2023/24 target for student voice should also be increased by 2% points given the importance of this area.

Clarification was given that the 2023/24 recruitment figures within the report are the actual enrolment numbers for this year. The board advised caution when setting recruitment targets for 2024/25, expressing that these should be realistic and achievable considering the challenges with recruitment over the last few years.

RESOLVED: That the board approve the quality targets and recommend to Group Board that these be included in the Group Strategic & Operational Development Plan.

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

### **11. a) Financial Position 2022/23**

The Head of Finance Business Partnering presented the financial position for the year ended 31 July 2023, noting that the EBITDA position of £536k represented an adverse performance against a year to date budget of £1,813k by £1,277k. It was explained that this is the net result of income being below budget by £1,917k, combined with an underspend of £640k against expenditure. The board noted that the largest variance in income related to tuition fees due to the impact of lower than target recruitment of students, though this was offset to a small degree by savings on staff costs due to vacancies.

### **b) Financial Position and Forecast 2023/24**

The board noted the financial position for UCLeeds for the first three months of the 2023/24 academic year. The Head of Finance Business Partnering explained that the EBITDA position at the end of October 2023 of (£1,071k) represented an adverse performance against the year-to-date budget of (£32k) as a result of income being below budget by £995k, combined with an overspend of £44k against expenditure. The board heard that, again, this below target financial performance was largely due to lower income as a result of not meeting student recruitment targets at the start of the year. However, it was explained that there were also AEB and apprenticeships income charges pending release at group level and some internal recharges relating to use of technicians at Harrogate and Keighley college, which will offset some of the overspend. The board discussed the staff costs within the report and members were informed that each budget holder owns their own staff costs and makes budget estimates for these as part of the business planning process. It was noted that some of the forecast staff costs appear to be out of line with the year to date expenditure and these would be adjusted accordingly. However, while it was agreed that, in the face of lower than budget income recruitment to vacant posts should be carefully managed, the board acknowledged that the curriculum review project will require additional resources and could be negatively impacted should a widescale freeze on recruitment be imposed.

## **12. Staff Survey Results 2022/23**

The Head of Learning and Organisational Development and Organisation Development Business Partner presented the UCLeeds staff survey results to the board, explaining that this is the first year that UCLeeds staff have been surveyed separately, so no year on year comparison data could be reported. The board heard that the top and bottom scoring areas were fairly consistent with the results at group level, particularly in relation to software and systems and communication from the Executive Team. It was hoped that introduction of Blackboard and Tribal SITs will begin to improve staff satisfaction with software and systems. The Dean explained that interrogating the comments made against responses at a more granular level has provided some insight into the reasons behind the lowest scoring areas, such as training and development, which related mostly to lack of CPD opportunities and access to training for part time staff. The largest gap between the UCLeeds and group results was in response to 'I am proud of where I work', which the board heard had also been disproportionately impacted by one department which has experienced a lot of change over the last year. The board agreed that overall the results paint a fairly positive picture and members were pleased to note the follow up actions planned both at group level and locally, to continue to build satisfaction for next year.

## **13. University Centre Leeds Annual Review**

The board reviewed the University Centre Leeds Annual Review for 2022/23, which outlined UCLeeds' performance in relation to key areas such as recruitment, retention and achievement as well as academic standards and graduate outcomes. The board noted in particular the areas for celebration highlighted in the report relating to external recognition and reputation, such as HTQ accreditations, the successful ITE Ofsted inspection and the strong performance in the NSS. While the board acknowledged that student recruitment decreased in 2022/23, it was noted that in-year retention improved at all levels in spite of the financial constraints that students are facing as a result of the cost of living crisis. The board also recognised that achievement had improved at all levels except Foundation Year. However, the Dean informed the board that 2022/23 also saw an increasing number of students failing to submit assessments on time, demonstrating a lack of engagement with the assessment process, which appears to be a trend amongst students post-Covid-19. The board was assured by the fact that academic misconduct cases had decreased again in 2022/23, following the issues regarding use of the AI on one course in 2021/22. However, this would continue to be monitored to ensure this issue does not occur again. The board commended the level of detail within the report and agreed that this performance data should be used to inform discussions at the UCLeeds Board Away Day in February.

## **14. Student Recruitment and Enrolment 2023/24**

The Associate Dean presented the latest enrolment figures for 2023/24 entry, noting that enrolments had been below target for the last two years. Due to this reduction in student numbers it was explained that curriculum planning and development of new degree programmes for a 2024 start had been paused. The focus for 2023/24 would be directed towards an intensive evaluation of the current curriculum portfolio and the development of existing provision to ensure that programmes meet regional priorities, align with the skills agenda, are destination led and are underpinned by employer engagement. The Associate Dean explained that courses that failed to recruit sufficient student numbers for two years in a row had been suspended and as part of the ongoing curriculum review a five point strategic plan had been developed for implementation over the next 15 months. This plan will focus on HTQ Development, Modular Acceleration Programmes, FD curriculum development, academics in practice and apprenticeship level 6 development. The project will look at employer engagement and consult with employers to ensure the curriculum is developed in a way that best meets local skills needs. The board heard that internal progression this year was the lowest it had been for three years. Therefore, assurance was given that a plan for increasing internal progression has been developed and will be managed by the HE Student Recruitment and Marketing team. Overall the board heard that Heads of Department have responded positively to the plans. It was agreed that the Link

Governor for Curriculum Development and Innovation should work closely with the Associate Dean to monitor progress with this curriculum development plan.

**15. Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 2022/23**

The board heard that the University Centre has made representation to the OfS regarding inconsistencies in the scoring of its TEF results and has been told that the OfS hopes to be able to consider all representations by 11 December. The board supported the decision to make representation to the OfS, as it was agreed that a number of the judgements in individual areas would typically indicate a silver award but members also acknowledged that a bronze award still indicates typically high quality.

**16. National Student Survey (NSS) Results 2022/23**

The board reviewed the NSS results for University Centre Leeds for 2022/23 noted that overall these demonstrate a strong picture once again, with positivity measures retained across most of the key themes. It was explained that changes to the NSS questions this year meant comparison with previous years would not be possible, but benchmarking against competitors demonstrates that UCLeeds has performed well in the sector. The Dean drew board members' attention to the programme level breakdown of results in the report, should members wish for additional detail regarding individual results. Board members congratulated the team on another year of strong NSS performance and emphasised that this is a strong marketing tool for the organisation that should be widely promoted.

**17. Group HE Student Information System Update**

The board received an update on progress with the development of the Group HE Student Information System and members were informed that there is now an increasing risk regarding the level of resource identified by Tribal as needed to operate the system following completion of the project. It was explained that this resource requirement had not been identified at the start of the project and had not been specified in the project scope. However, assurance was given that the Project Sponsor is working with Tribal to identify the exact level of resource needed and any additional charges for the project would be met at Group level.

**18. Assurance Reporting**

The board received and noted assurance reports relating to Disability Support, Health and Safety and People Services. There was no report relating to safeguarding as it is currently not possible to provide the data for UCLeeds separately due to the categorisations within CPOMs. A piece of work will be undertaken to re-categorise data so that UCLeeds safeguarding can be reported on for next academic year.

**19. Senior Staff Remuneration**

Separate confidential minutes refer.

The meeting closed at 7.10pm

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