

LUMINATE EDUCATION GROUP

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE UNIVERSITY CENTRE LEEDS BOARD HELD ON MONDAY 25 NOVEMBER 2024

Present

Colin Booth	Group CEO and Governor
Charlotte Catmull	Staff Board Member
Mark Garratt (Chair)	Governor
Allison Mortimer	Student member
Katie Miller	Co-optee
Rod Peet	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	Associate Dean
Eleanor Harris	Governance Manager
Sarah Heaton (item 13)	Head of Learning & Organisational Development
Bill Jones	Deputy CEO and Executive Principal
Sarah Marquez	Dean of HE
Steve Navotni (item 13)	Learning & Organisational Development Business Partner
Gemma Simmons-Blench	Deputy CEO, Curriculum & Quality
Joanne Tyssen	Director of HE Quality and Standards
Paul Ward (items 1 – 6 & 14)	Group Head of Finance Business Partnering
David Warren	Group Vice Principal Development
Joe Wilson (to item 10b)	Principal, Leeds Conservatoire

The meeting started at 4.00pm.

PART 1 - MEETING ADMINISTRATION AND GOVERNANCE

1. Welcome and Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were recorded from Aisha Ali (Co-optee), Javaad Alipoor (Co-optee), Brian Culleton (Co-optee) and June Dennis (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 24 June 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 either complete or due for completion at a future date. It was confirmed that a tour of Mabgate would take place as part of the away day in February.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the board held on 24 June 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 and the Joint HE Development Day

The Chair updated the board on the discussions and key decisions from the meetings of the Group Board held in July, September and October. Of particular note for UC Leeds, the board heard that a risk related to lower than forecast HE student recruitment had been added to the group risk register. A number of group policies relating to safeguarding, EDI, careers, SEND, people (recruitment and staff code of conduct) and conflicts of interest and related party transactions were also approved and made available to view in Board Effect. The Group Board also received the gender pay gap report for 2024, which showed a mean pay gap of 4.1% (down from the previous year) and a median pay gap of 2.91% (up from the previous year). It was noted that the current pay gap is much lower than other public sector organisations and the group continues to work to reduce this pay gap each year.

A joint development session for members of the UC Leeds and Leeds Conservatoire Boards was held in October, with good representation from both boards present. Topics covered included a training session regarding the OfS conditions of registration delivered by Advance HE, a look at financial benchmarking data for group services and a deep dive discussion regarding the financial health of the sector.

The Chair informed board members that he had attended the UC Leeds graduations on 9 November, which was a very positive and celebratory day. A number of board members from the UC Leeds Board and across the group had also attended the ceremonies.

5b) Student Member Update

The student board member informed the board that a proposal had been put forward within the Students' Union for all SU Officer posts, with the exception of the SU President, to become voluntary from 2025/26, as salaries for paid officers make up 90% of the SU's budget. A vote on this proposal was planned for December. Concern was expressed that this may impact on the level of interest that will be generated for SU Officer posts in the future and the amount of time that these officers will be able to dedicate to the role. The Deputy CEO & Executive Principal and Deputy CEO Curriculum & Quality undertook to discuss the proposal with the Students' Union Manager and assured the board that due process would be followed for any changes implemented.

5c) Link Governor Feedback

The board heard that in the summer the Link Governor for Curriculum, Innovation & Skills attended a briefing meeting with the Dean of HE and the Deputy CEO Curriculum and Quality regarding the UC Leeds Skills Contribution, in preparation for Ofsted. One of the Vice Chairs of Group Board, Ken Morton, had also visited UC Leeds earlier in November to sit in on a lesson with Access Students. Board members were informed that a full report from this visit is available in Board Effect.

6. Proposed Governance Arrangements for 2024/25

The Governance Manager explained that it was proposed to amend the board Terms of Reference (ToR) to include the appointment of up to two Vice Chairs. A call for nominations for these roles would be sent out before Christmas with approval to be sought by email in order to have the Vice Chair(s) in place before the March meeting.

The board confirmed that the current list of Link Governor roles remained fit for purpose and a request was made for volunteers to fill the vacant roles. It was confirmed that

individual effectiveness review meetings would be arranged for the Chair with each board member before the next meeting.

RESOLVED: That the board approve the proposed effectiveness review process, list of link governors and board ToR and recommend that the ToR be approved by Group Board.

PART 2 – STRATEGY, POLICY AND RISK MANAGEMENT

7. Strategic Deep Dive: Student Numbers and Level 3 Progression

The Deputy CEO & Executive Principal and Deputy CEO, Curriculum and Quality presented to the board regarding planned actions to increase levels of internal progression from within the group to UC Leeds. While it was acknowledged that there is a current trend in declining student numbers across lower ranking HE institutions and HE in FE, the level of FE provision within the group presents an opportunity for recruitment. The board heard that level 3 progression has been low and decreasing over the last few years for a number of reasons, including fierce competition within the sector, a need for improved communication and better understanding of internal progression routes among staff and students.

Although it was acknowledged that not all level 3 students within the group will have higher education as their destination or will be suited to progressing to a course at UC Leeds, a mapping exercise was being carried out to identify students and pathways where internal progression may offer the best destination. In order to ensure internal progression remains a priority it has been included as a target for each of the FE colleges. In addition, the board heard that better use will be made of recruitment fairs, internal communications and careers guidance to allow students to meet UC Leeds tutors and gain a better understanding of the opportunities UC Leeds can offer. The board was assured by the level of priority with which this is being treated at management level and emphasised that staff engagement and upskilling are crucial, as well as engagement with parents. The board requested that the baseline data from the mapping exercise identifying the potential progression routes be shared at a future date. It was also agreed that a further discussion regarding internal progression should be held at the board away day in February.

8. UC Leeds Skills Contribution

The Dean of HE and Associate Dean gave a presentation outlining the civic, community, education and employer stakeholder activity undertaken since the last meeting to contribute to the Ofsted Skills Judgement for the group. The board heard that the Local Skills Improvement Fund capital allocation is being used for a number of projects related to FinTech including the creation of a FinTech academy, which would help with the development of digital skills. Work to build awareness of HTQs among employers was also continuing. It was noted that, while there has been a lot of discussion from the government regarding the importance of HTQs, there has not been much follow through activity to help with promotion.

The board discussed in particular, the work being undertaken with employers such as the Level 7 research scientist hybrid learning programme with Labcorp, which is being used as an opportunity to pilot hybrid and distance learning models and UC Leeds. Board members were informed that UC Leeds is one of only two providers offering HTQ in science and that this programme would enable UC Leeds to continue to develop its more niche areas of provision.

9. Dean's Report

a) UCLeeds Activity Update

The board noted the update regarding recent activity within UC Leeds, in particular the review of the departmental structure, which has reduced curriculum departments from five to three, with the intention of both saving costs and aligning subject areas to be more

reflective of sector and employer needs. Assurance was given that UC Leeds is working with the Change Management Team on implementing these changes.

b) Strategic Plan 2023-2026 – Progress Update

The Associate Dean informed the board that in the year since the strategic plan was launched significant progress has been made towards a number of priorities, particularly in relation to innovative practice through the Curriculum Development Project, which was moving to its next phase, focused on strengthening the employer focus of the newly implemented curriculum. With regard to inclusive practice, the board was assured that staff wellbeing continues to be a focus, particularly during the ongoing departmental restructure, with an increased emphasis on and guidance for use of KIT meetings and a review of workload and work patterns underway as well as mindful communications around Mabgate and the impact of declining student numbers on staff.

c) Risk Management Annual Report 2023/24

The board reviewed the risk management annual report for 2023/24, which outlined changes to the risk register throughout the year. It was noted that risk FB16006, related to the NSS had been removed at the start of the year due to consistently strong results over a number of years and that risk FB160011 related to the HE student information system had been removed during the year as that was now being monitored through the separate HE Quality risk register.

RESOLVED: That the board approve the risk management annual report for 2023/24

d) Review of UC Leeds Risk Register 2024/25

The Dean of HE drew the board's attention to the proposal to remove risk UC3, related to the failure to obtain degree awarding powers (DAPs) as bachelor degree awarding powers had been granted by the OfS. It was also proposed to remove risk UC13, related to apprenticeship recruitment as relationships with new companies had been established and to remove risk UC16, related to international recruitment as the international sponsorship license had been obtained. Board members queried whether UC Leeds owns any student accommodation to attract international students and it was confirmed that, while UC Leeds does not have its own accommodation, an agreement had been put in place to open up Leeds Conservatoire accommodation to UC Leeds students.

RESOLVED: That the board approve updates to the risk register including the removal of risks UC3, UC13 and UC16.

10. Student Recruitment & Marketing

a) Student Recruitment & Marketing Update

The Vice Principal Development presented the report, explaining that the new Group Director of Student Recruitment & Marketing would be commencing in post from December. Overall, the board heard that enrolments for 2024/25 were down 17% compared to 2023/24, continuing the trend of lower student numbers and impacted particularly by lower than planned level 4 full-time applicants. However, full-time level 6 enrolments rose by 18% in 2024/25, demonstrating the positive impact of the changes made to the progression process for these students.

The board was informed that, although changes to the UC Leeds course portfolio were expected to increase student numbers in the long term, this had created a short term risk to recruitment to these programmes. As the full 3-year degree routes replacing the foundation degree and top-up routes were still unconfirmed there was a risk of either causing confusion to applicants by marketing both programmes or missing crucial marketing opportunities if marketing activity was delayed until the courses are validated. In order to mitigate this, it was planned to continue to market foundation and top up routes for 2025/26 entry, with applicants kept informed about the potential changes to their course throughout

the application process. Given the risks around student recruitment the board agreed to hold a further, in depth discussion on this topic at the board away day in February.

b) International Recruitment Update

The Director of International Recruitment provided the board with a progress update regarding with international recruitment since UC Leeds received its International Student Sponsor Licence in July 2024. The board heard that the initial focus was on acquiring new agents to recruit international students, particularly in South Asia and South East Asia. It was agreed that the price of UC Leeds' international fees, being on the lower end of the market (£13k UG with a £3k scholarship), was appropriate given the new market and would also be attractive to agents.

Board members emphasised that rapid turnaround is key for successful international recruitment and assurance was given that response times had been set at 24 hours for an enquiry and 48 hours for an application. It was also explained that both admissions staff and academic were being trained to understand entry requirements in order to process applications quickly. Although initial planned international student numbers were only small and for a limited portfolio, it was intended numbers would increase in subsequent years.

11. HE Harassment, Violence & Sexual Misconduct Policy

The Director of HE Quality and Standards explained that the Harassment, Violence and Sexual Misconduct policy had been in development in line with the OfS requirements around non-disclosure agreements and freedom of speech to ensure compliance with the newly introduced condition of registration, which would come into force from September 2025. The board heard that the policy was reviewed and approved by the Leeds Conservatoire Board in October and would be applicable to both HE providers, but would not apply to the FE parts of the group.

RESOLVED: That the board approve the HE Harassment, Violence and Sexual Misconduct Policy.

12. Mabgate Development and Sale of College House – Progress Update

The Group Vice Principal Development gave the board an update on progress with the new UC Leeds building at Mabgate, which was on target for completion by 1 September 2025. The sale of the current University Centre building was in progress, with a proposal due to be submitted to the Property Strategy Committee in December.

PART 3 – PERFORMANCE MONITORING AND SCRUTINY

13. Staff Survey Results 2023/24

The Head of Learning and Organisational Development presented the staff survey results for UC Leeds for 2023/24, which demonstrated high levels of satisfaction (combining strongly agree, agree and neither agree nor disagree responses) for most areas, with the exception of software and systems, which scored 48%. Board members acknowledged that this question scored consistently lowest across the group which was not unusual.

The board heard that, although combining the three positive measures placed UC Leeds above the sector average for most areas, when compared to the UK Benchmark in the Employee Engagement Index which combined only the strongly agree and agree responses, UC Leeds scored below the national average at 56% satisfaction (compared to 62%), indicating that a significant proportion of respondents chose the 'neither agree nor disagree' response. It was acknowledged that staff were experiencing a lot of change and board members were assured that the results would be broken down to a granular level to provide further insight into the reasons for some of the lower scoring areas.

14. Financial Performance

a) Financial Outturn 2023/24

The Head of Finance Business Partnering presented the financial outturn for the year ended 31 July 2024 explaining that overall UC Leeds had finished the year in a negative EBITDA position of -2.9% compared to the budgeted position of 12.9%, due primarily to lower than planned student recruitment. While staff costs were favourable to budget overall due to a number of vacancy savings made in year, this was offset by higher than planned project related expenditure and lower than planned income from service charges due to a member of staff being directly transferred to another department.

b) Financial Position & Forecast 2024/25

The board reviewed the financial position for the current year to 31 October 2024, which was behind the budget position due primarily to lower than forecast student recruitment at the start of the academic year. It was explained that due to the timing of some AEB funding the variance may not be as high in the next iteration of the report but would still be significant due to the lower than planned recruitment. Confirmation was given that the budget accounted for the reduced fee income from the previous years. However, the further reduction in fee income this year would place additional pressure on the budget.

15. Quality

a) Quality of Education Report

The board noted that retention in both HE programmes and apprenticeships had dropped slightly compared to the 2022/23 end of year position, although it was recognised that both of these areas still demonstrated strong performance. Continuation and completion rates were also both reported to be strong in all areas except PGCE, which performed below the OfS B3 thresholds due primarily to workload expectations. However, assurance was given that UC Leeds was working to clarify workload expectations for trainee and newly qualified teachers to support improvement in this area.

Progression rates for all areas were below the threshold, impacted largely by the foundation degree and top-up model. Assurance was given that actions to improve response rates were being put in place and a narrative regarding the challenges that reporting of progression creates for institutions with the foundation top up model was being developed.

b) National Student Survey (NSS) Results 2023/24

The Group Director for HE Quality and Standards presented the NSS results, which the board was pleased to note were the highest in Leeds for the fifth year running. Although results for most questions were very strong, it was recognised that the results for learning resources was below benchmark again. This result was disproportionately impacted by responses in the Healthcare Play specialism and assurance was given that actions are being put in place to improve this for future years. It was also expected that once this provision had moved to Mabgate results for learning and resources would improve.

PART 4 – ASSURANCE REPORTING

16. Annual Assurance Reports

The board noted annual assurance reports related to safeguarding, disability support and health & safety.

The meeting closed at 6.48pm

Signed: (Chair) Date: