

MINUTES

BOARD OF GOVERNORS, BG-130

Date: Thursday 12 October 2023

Time: 1400

Location: CA105/6, Catalyst, Leek Rd

Notes:

1. *Items marked with an asterisk (starred items) are for information only or regarded as noncontentious. Starred items will not be discussed and will be assumed to have been noted or approved unless a request to unstar a named item is received from a Board member in advance, or at the commencement, of the meeting.*
2. *Items classified as Confidential, and their subsequent minutes, will be redacted before publication of the agenda and minutes on the University's public website.*

Members		
Olayemi Ajiteru	Student Governor (President, Students' Union)	P
Jonathan Chapman	External Member	P
Mohit Dhingra	External Member	P
Kevin Gould	External Member	P
Chris Headleand	Staff Governor (academic staff)	P
Saima Hussain	Staff Governor (professional services staff)	P
Colin Hughes (Chair)	External Member	P
Professor Martin Jones	Vice Chancellor	P
Baljinder Kuller	External Member	P
Martin Pugh	External Member	P
Kim Newell Chebator	External Member	P(T)
Juliet Oosthuysen	External Member	P
Leonard Stewart	Student Governor	P
In attendance		
Ian Blachford	Chief Operating Officer and Clerk to the Board of Governors	IA
Dr Annabel Kiernan	Pro Vice Chancellor - Education	IA
Professor Kevin Hetherington	Deputy Vice Chancellor	IA
Sally McGill	Chief Financial Officer	IA
Professor Raheel Nawaz	Pro Vice Chancellor – Digital Transformation	IA
Sue Boyce	Assistant Clerk to the Board of Governors (<i>minutes</i>)	IA(T)

P = Present; A = Apologies; Ab = Absent; L = Late; IA = In Attendance; T = via Teams

1 MEETING MANAGEMENT											
2829	No Apologies for Absence were received.										
2830	There were no new Declarations of Interest .										
2831	<p>Membership of the Board of Governors for 2023-24:</p> <table> <tr> <td>Constitution</td> <td>Membership</td> </tr> <tr> <td>External Members</td> <td>Dr Jonathan Chapman (Deputy Chair)</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>Mohit Dhingra</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>Kevin Gould</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>Colin Hughes (Chair)</td> </tr> </table>	Constitution	Membership	External Members	Dr Jonathan Chapman (Deputy Chair)		Mohit Dhingra		Kevin Gould		Colin Hughes (Chair)
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	Colin Hughes (Chair)										

	<p>Baljinder Kuller Kim Newell Chebator Juliet Oosthuysen Martin Pugh VACANCY x2</p> <p>Student Governors Olayemi Ajiteru (President, Students' Union) Leonard Stuart (Vice President, Students' Union)</p> <p>Staff Governors Chris Headleand (Academic Staff governor) Saima Hussain (Professional Support governor)</p> <p>Vice Chancellor Professor Martin Jones</p> <p>In attendance Ian Blachford, Chief Operating Officer & Clerk to the Board Professor Kevin Hetherington, Deputy Vice Chancellor Professor Annabel Kiernan, Pro Vice Chancellor - Academic Sally McGill, Chief Financial Officer & Deputy Chief Executive Professor Raheel Nawaz, Pro Vice Chancellor – Digital Transformation</p> <p>Co-opted Committee Members for 2023-24:</p> <p>Mike Herbert Sustainability and Resources Committee Ian Jenkinson Sustainability and Resources Committee</p>
2832	The Minutes of the last meeting of the Board of Governors, 28 June 2023 BG/129/01 were confirmed as a true and accurate record.
2833	<p>Matters arising:</p> <p>Minute 2817 (BG-129) – Police Apprenticeship Contract – to note that this had now been signed by the three forces to extend provision on reduced student numbers for 12 months and the contract had also been signed by West Midlands for the teach out arrangements.</p> <p>Minute 2818 (BG-129) – Branding – to note that following the last meeting of the Board an update paper was circulated on progress with the branding project. Furthermore a session had been arranged for governors to contribute their reflections in the branding discovery stage on 12th July 2023. A further meeting was also arranged for feedback from the discovery stage with governors on 27th July 2023. Finally, meetings were held on 28th and 29th September to share early stage thinking of the redeveloped brand.</p> <p>Minute 2819 (BG-129) – Composition - Keiran Myall had been approached to join the Board but had declined due to work commitments. The Nominations and Governance Committee is progressing with the vacancies in conjunction with Nurole. A shortlist of five female candidates has been prepared and interviews are being held on 6th October 2023 and 12th October 2023.</p> <p>Minute 2822 (BG-129) – Cost of Living Pay Award – the cost of living pay award had been paid as per the national agreement from 1st August 2023.</p>
2 STRATEGIC OVERVIEW	
2834	<p>The External Developments Report BG/130/02 was introduced for discussion by the Vice Chancellor, exploring the developments since the last Board meeting across the sector.</p> <p>The Vice Chancellor noted the launch of the report entitled 'Developing a UK measure of students basic needs – a pilot study' at the party conferences and this would be circulated to all governors following the meeting.</p> <p>There were no comments and the report was noted.</p>
2835	<p>The Vice Chancellor made a statement to the Board of Governors to introduce the Assessment of University's Position for Academic Year 2023-24 and beyond BG/130/03</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Vice Chancellor wished to focus on two issues with the Board. The first was the matter of the feeling of being wrongfooted by the financial situation and secondly the financial impact itself. • The Vice Chancellor explained the background to the financial position and the causes which led to the fall in income and the need to reduce expenditure. • The Vice Chancellor explained that a number of changes could be delivered to improve governance in the light of learning over Summer 2023. This would include a virtual 'one agenda item' meeting during the summer recess of Board meetings, greater triangulation between papers, and greater emphasis on scenario planning. <p>In response the governors made the following points:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Colin Hughes highlighted the importance of returning a surplus each year to be in an advantageous position with the bank covenants. This meant the university needed to make a surplus each year, despite the level of reserves being healthy. Kim Newell Chebator asked about whether the culture of the university was supportive of bad news. Martin Jones responded that there exists a culture of honesty with staff and between managers, however the university needed to improve on reporting, scenario planning and highlighting risks or concerns. <p>There were no further comments and the report was noted.</p>
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3 FOR DISCUSSION AND/OR APPROVAL

2836	<p>The Student Recruitment Update 2023-24 BG/130/04 was introduced by Pro Vice Chancellor Academic, Annabel Kiernan who relayed that this year's cycle has been different to previous years, including the clearing period. There have been several reasons for this nationally:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The cost-of-living crisis has impacted on applicant decision making with UCAS reporting fewer students applying to university by the January deadline than in 2022 (499,320 vs 480,670) Grade boundaries returning to pre-pandemic levels. This mostly impacted higher tariff institutions which meant that the competition for students who were rejected by these, meant that more universities remained in clearing for longer, resulting in a prolonged increase in competition. Students being heavily influenced on pay and conditions in two key areas: Nursing and Teaching. This resulted in a national reduction of applicants for both sets of programmes. <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mohit Dhingra asked about the conversion rates. Annabel Kiernan stated that the conversion rate was strong, but the fall in applications was the more significant issue. This would be unpacked at the November Strategic Event. Olayemi Ajiteru asked why the international undergraduates had been combined with the home undergraduates. It was explained that this was because the international undergraduate numbers were very small. Olayemi Ajiteru asked about the decision for the increase in the international postgraduate deposit and it was explained that it was a specific decision which brought the university into the same position as the majority of the sector. It was noted that the university also had in place scholarship opportunities that were widely publicised. <p>There were no further comments and the report was noted.</p>
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2837	<p>The Draft Financial Out-turn 2022-23 (incl. July 2023 Mgmt Accts) BG/130/05 was introduced for discussion by the Chief Financial Officer & Deputy Chief Executive. The following main points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The audited statements are to be recommended for approval and sign-off by the Board of Governors at its meeting on 28th November 2023, after having also been presented to Audit and Risk Committee on 25th October 2023 and the Sustainability and Resources Committee on 16th November 2023. The tables were provided to give a summary of the University's financial performance for the year, which would be shown in more detail in the financial statements. <p>There were no comments and the paper was noted.</p>
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2838	<p>The Bad Debt Provision 2022-2023 BG/130/06 was introduced for approval by Chief Financial Officer & Deputy Chief Executive and the paper outlines that the increase in the bad debt provision relates to three main areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> International Students - This academic year has seen a considerable increase in income from international students and the bad debt provision has been affected accordingly. The increase in income has largely related to post graduate taught courses where the students have come from four main countries: Nigeria, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. It was proving more difficult than expected to collect overdue debts from current students due to the financial climate in those countries. Many of these students were having difficulty moving sterling out of their countries to pay their fees or the value of their home currency had been affected by inflation. Ex-students - The provision for ex-students (including debt agency) has increased by £407,319, and this highlights the difficulty in collecting debt from ex-students, many of whom do not complete their studies and therefore the University does not have any effective leverage eg. holding back their degree certificate. All debt that Credit Control or a debt collection agency believe is uncollectable or financially unviable to chase has been written off this year. Student Loan Company (SLC) - The provision for Student Loan Company (SLC) has increased by £668,722 in the year and this provision is split between Not Due (10% provision), 2022/23 Overdue Debt (20% provision) and Prior to 2022/23 Overdue Debt (100% provision). The provision relating to overdue debt has only increased by £53,276 and therefore the main increase is due the provision of debt that was not yet due at year end. For 2022/23, for the first time, there was a cohort of May starters at CECOS (a partner college), and this has seen the debt from SLC, that was
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not due at year end, increase from £1,423,005, in 2021/22, to £7,757,462 in 2022/23, an increase of £6,154,457. This additional debt, which was not yet due, was provided for at year end at 10% of this debt.

There were no comments and the paper was approved.

The **Draft Budget BG/130/07 and a Presentation on Expenditure Reduction** were introduced for approval by Chief Financial Officer & Deputy Chief Executive and the following main points were noted:

- Stress-testing of the budget, and the five-year strategic financial plan, specifically around cash and going concern, were to be considered in a separate paper.
- This paper focussed on the budget and expenditure reduction.
- The operating surplus has been set at 3% to reflect the University's current operating position.

2839

Members and attendees commented as follows:

- Jonathan Chapman asked about the position of non pay expenditure such as professional development. It was explained that professional development was being reduced in some areas but remained important for the upskilling of the workforce. All non pay expenditure was being reviewed.
- Colin Hughes complimented the considered and staged approach. Colin Hughes asked if the academic school restructure would impact upon agility. It was discussed that it was recognised that the schools were already different sizes and thus the balancing of these would be important. The changes would not impact on agility.
- Leonard Stuart asked about the impact of severance on staff. Ian Blachford explained that the university had offered targeted managed severance in the past together with a rationale, which was explained to staff. This provided a balanced and proportional approach to staff reductions.
- Colin Hughes asked when were the critical dates for the income projections for the 2024 – 2025 academic year. It was confirmed that the first date would be the 31 January 2024 UCAS main cycle application deadline date. At this point, the range of interventions to be deployed would be reassessed by the Board of Governors.
- Martin Pugh asked about the level of risk in terms of the delivery of the waves and an understanding on the impact of the implementation of these on the staff and student experience. It was noted that the delivery of the programme would present challenges but the impact of these would need to be mitigated in implementation.

- [REDACTED]
- Mohit Dhingra asked how confident the Executive were in the delivery of the stated savings. Martin Jones explained that there was an organisational track recording of achieving this. Ian Blachford added that the university was now much larger in staff numbers and costs and therefore the plan was achievable but delivery would be challenging within the timescales.
- Martin Pugh asked about the savings targets prescribed. It was stated that the targets would be required to be delivered by each area but these responses would be sense checked and moderated. As a consequence some areas may be required to provide more savings in order to protect income generation and student experience.
- Colin Hughes asked the Board to consider the Strategic Plan and its fitness for purpose. Martin Jones explained that the size and shape of the Strategic Plan would need to be reviewed at the strategic event but it was his view that the direction was correct, but the scale of ambition needs to be reviewed. Furthermore, all areas of the university's operations need to be reviewed for example, Staffordshire University London. A significant amount of time would also be spent on the academic portfolio.

- [REDACTED]
- Colin Hughes asked about the impact of the staffing reduction and workloads. It was discussed that activities would need to be prioritised and where possible operational improvements/automation be implemented to assist. Raheel Nawaz stated the Digital Transformation Plan would be recalibrated to ensure that priorities were clearly identified and a reduced range supported to speed up the delivery.
- It was agreed that the Chairs of the Committee would receive an update every month to share progress on the delivery.

There were no further comments and the Board approved the draft budget.

2840	<p>The Five Year Strategic Financial Plan 2023-2028 BG/130/08 was introduced for discussion by the Chief Financial Officer & Deputy Chief Executive.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sally McGill highlighted that the Five Year Strategic Financial Plan would be reworked in the light of the expected financial outturn for the year, and would return to the Board of Governors meeting on 28 November 2023. The Board did therefore not need to approve this paper.
2841	<p>The Preferred Bidder for Student Village and Hub BG/130/09 was introduced for approval by the Chief Financial Office and Deputy Chief Executive. Sally McGill stated that the project had been progressing well and the Board of Governors were asked to appoint Staffordshire Campus Living as the preferred bidder and to approve the signature of the preferred bidder letter.</p> <p>Approval will be sought from the Board of Governors in March 2024, for the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the finalised capital contribution to the scheme including the cost of the Hub the University's participation in the Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) to be set up to control the scheme (including the University's equity share) signing the project legal documentation <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mohit Dhingra asked what would happen from here until the final formal approval. Sally McGill highlighted that the public consultation would take place as part of the planning application for the local authority and planning would be known by Christmas 2023. Jonathan Chapman asked about lessons learnt from the Catalyst. Sally McGill responded that these were being embedded such as the contractor being in charge of both the digital and audio visual infrastructure and being responsible for the appointment and management of the sub-contractors. Leonard Stuart commented that the plans looked very pleasing but noted the increase in the cost of student accommodation. Sally McGill explained that the rents had been suppressed over recent years due to the quality of available university accommodation. It was agreed that Sally McGill would liaise directly with Leonard Stewart after the meeting to explain the detailed considerations behind this. Chris Headleand asked about the involvement of academic staff in the design of spaces. Sally McGill agreed to pick up a conversation with Chris Headleand on this outside of the meeting, to again explain the process to date. <p>There were no further comments and the report was approved.</p>
2842	<p>The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) Report BG/130/10 was introduced for discussion by the Pro Vice Chancellor Academic.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The university submitted its TEF application in January 2023 and received a provisional institutional overall rating of Silver in July 2023 The overall rating reflects provisional awards for Silver in both the Student Experience and the Student Outcomes categories. Gold meant the student experience and outcomes are typically outstanding, Silver meant very high quality For Student Experience, the university received 1 Gold, 6 Silver, and 1 Bronze element. In the Student Outcomes category, it received 4 Silver and 2 Bronze elements. Analysis of our performance indicates that whilst our performance is overall above benchmark, our data does not indicate performance <i>materially</i> above benchmark (+2.5%), which is a determining factor for a Gold award. The TEF statement outcome identified three areas of insufficient institutional evidence, and awarded Bronze in: SE3 <i>Research, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and/or employer engagement</i>, SO5 <i>Approaches to supporting educational gains</i>, and SO6 <i>Evaluation and demonstration of educational gains</i>. Representation was submitted in September 2023 to address the Bronze elements. The published TEF outcomes for the sector show Gold: 46 institutions, Silver: 100 institutions, Bronze: 29 institutions with 53 providers, <u>not gold</u>, including Staffordshire, as 'Pending'. Unlike previous TEF iterations, the award in 2023 will be for four years. <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Martin Pugh highlighted that the police apprenticeship provision had impacted upon the TEF and NSS. Annabel Kiernan stated that the apprenticeship provision was important and the university needs to consider again, the apprenticeship student experience, which differs to the traditional student experience. Martin Jones highlighted also that the scale of apprenticeships numbers had impacted on the NSS. The focus on the student experience of apprenticeships was being addressed in-year as a priority to mitigate the impact on the NSS in 2023-2024. <p>There were no further comments and the report was noted.</p>
2843	<p>The Student Satisfaction Report (NSS) 2023 BG/130/11 was introduced for discussion by the Pro Vice Chancellor Academic.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making comparisons with the NSS 2023 results and those from previous years is challenging due to the significant amount of change to the survey design, methodology and question (data) set for this year's iteration of NSS. • However, the simplest way to understand year on year overall satisfaction is to compare the mean satisfaction from the eight themes used this year with those scores in 2022 and 2021, giving the nearest possible comparator with 2023. The key finding from this analysis indicates that following a <i>drop</i> of 1.06% between 2021 and 2022, there has been a net <i>increase</i> in positivity by +1.8% in the NSS 2023 results. • Based on whole university data, the University has improved in three indicators (Themes 3, 4 and 6); however, the sector has moved much faster than, leading to significant drops in our rankings above. Furthermore the University has gone down in three indicators (Themes 2, 5 and 7); the sector has also declined in first two of these themes, but the decline has been sharper than the rest of the sector, leading to significant drops in ranking. • However, 42 of 70 courses at Staffordshire University have exceeded their subject benchmarks for overall positivity – indicating that 60% of our provision is above subject benchmark. • While the sector comparison is not where we would like it to be, the university is not systemically underperforming, and but there is every confidence that this will improve, as areas specifically targeted for improvement through NSS Plans and Academic Development support last year have all had a clear positive improvement in key metrics. • It was noted that whilst these were areas of great strength to the NSS, there was a need to improve the university's performance in relation to the sector as this would impact upon league tables and reputation. <p>There were no further comments and the report was noted.</p>
2844	<p>The Brand Project Update BG/130/12 was introduced by the Pro Vice Chancellor Academic who updated the Board on the project timeline. A critical point has now been reached at stage 2 'define' of the project plan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annabel Kiernan advised the Board that a brand voice presentation had been held with the core project team, and presentations will take place to the Board of Governors on 28 and 29 September. At these sessions there will be a reminder of key takeaways from the insight report and members will be taken on a journey of translating the organisational strategy into a powerful brand strategy, outlining the university's beliefs, vision, ambition, purpose, positioning, promise, reasons to believe and personality. There will be an opportunity to comment on all aspects. • The Board will also be presented with five options for the brand proposition, three of which would progress to the next stage of testing. <p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Juliet Oosthuysen asked whether there was a plan to test the branding concepts with parents of students. It was agreed that this would be progressed as part of stage two. <p>There were no further comments and the report was noted.</p>
2845	<p>The Staff make Staffs cultural development survey results 2023 BG/130/13 were introduced for discussion by the Chief Operating Officer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Staff Make Staffs Cultural Development Programme aims to identify cultural strengths and weaknesses within the University and to understand its current culture relative to a researched model of high performing organisations. • Various initiatives and measures have been implemented since a steering group was formed, which are outlined in the report, culminating in the University being re-surveyed in June 2023 and the survey results being released in July 2023. • It was highlighted by the Chief Operating Officer that the university had improved its culture against the Dennison reporting model in 2023 and this was a significant achievement. All areas of the circumplex had improved. It was noted that further work would need to be undertaken in schools, who reported less well than services. <p>There were no comments and further updates will be provided to the Board of Governors, through the Sustainability and Resources Committee.</p>
2846	<p>The Target Operating Model BG/130/14 was introduced for discussion by the Chief Operating Officer and the Chief Financial Officer/Deputy Chief Executive.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This paper provided the Board of Governors with an update on the early-stage work being undertaken with the Target Operating Model, to engage governors with this and for them to share any insights at this early stage. As the programme of work develops, there will be regular updates to the Chairs of Committee monthly meetings, the Sustainability and Resources Committee and onward referral to the Board of Governors. • The Target Operating Model will support the delivery of the 'Catalyst for Change' Strategic Plan, the School Five Year Business Plans, the six Strategic Priorities and ultimately deliver the KPIs. The Target Operating Model will determine the appropriate business model and allocation of resources for the University and ensure a blueprint exists for the long-term financial sustainability of the University, by controlling costs against income. Furthermore, it will triangulate with the future direction of the Digital Transformation Plan and reflect the values of the organisation, aligned to the rebranding project.

	<p>Members and attendees commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Juliet Oosthuysen stated that it would be helpful to have a high level diagram of the approach and questioned whether the references to rebranding should be described as repositioning. It was agreed in future reports a diagram would be provided. The use of the word repositioning instead of rebranding was agreed. <p>There were no further comments and the report was noted.</p>
2847	<p>The Board were asked to approve the Collaborative Academic Provision Register 2023 BG/130/15. This is the formal list of collaborative academic partnerships and the courses delivered in partnership as of August 2023.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staffordshire University is committed to working with a range of partner organisations to raise aspirations and improve pathways into Higher Education. Partnerships enable the University to extend its provision locally, nationally and internationally while offering diverse learning and teaching opportunities for different learner demographics that leverage the expertise and resources of academic, FE and employer partners. Collaborative developments are closely linked to the University's recruitment and teaching and learning strategies while enhancing its national and regional profile. <p>The Collaborative Academic Provision Register was discussed and the register was approved.</p>
2848	<p>The Board received for approval the Students' Union Memorandum of Understanding 2023-2024 BG/130/16 The memorandum of Understanding with the Student Union is refreshed annually and approved by the Board of Trustees of the Student Union and the University.</p> <p>The there were no comments and the Memorandum of Understanding was approved for the academic year 2023-2024.</p>
2849	<p>The Access and Participation Plan Submission to the OfS was received by the Board BG/130/17 and noted.</p>
5 FOR INFORMATION	
2850	<p>The Students' Union Report BG/130/18 was received by the Board and noted for information.</p>
2851	<p>The Apprenticeships Performance BG/130/19 was received by the Board and noted for information.</p>
2852	<p>*Academic Board minutes 291 (confirmed): 14 June 2023 * BG/130/20 The academic board confirmed minutes were noted for information.</p>
6 ADDITIONAL MATTERS	
2853	<p>Any additional matters None</p>
2854	<p>Next meeting: Tuesday 28 November 2023 (CA105/6, Catalyst, Leek Rd)</p>