

**University of Central Lancashire**

**Unreserved Minutes of the Board Meeting Held on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2021 commencing at 10.00am via video-conference**

**Present:**

David Taylor (Chair)

Graham Baldwin	Sue Ion
Zuleikha Chikh	Lesley Lloyd
Nicky Danino	Ruth Lowry
Maria Darby-Walker	Anne McCarthy
Jim Edney	Bill McQueen
Ridwanah Gurjee	Lorraine Norris
Richard Hext	

**Also in attendance (via video-conference):**

Michael Ahern (Chief Information and Infrastructure Officer)  
George Charles (Chief Finance Officer)  
Ruth Connor (Chief Marketing Officer)  
Ian Fisher (University Secretary and General Counsel and Clerk to the Board)  
Ken Lee (Chief People Officer)  
Lynne Livesey (Deputy Vice-Chancellor)  
Peter McMellon (assisting the Clerk to the Board)  
Fiona Winters (Deputy Clerk to the Board)  
Lisa Atty (Governance Support Officer)

**UB891. Welcome and Apologies**

The Chair welcomed all present to the meeting.

Apologies for absence had been received from Andrea Adams and Fiona Armstrong.

**UB892. Declaration of Interests**

There were no new declarations of interests.

**UB893. Chair's Announcements**

There were no announcements by the Chair.

**UB894. Reserved and Unreserved Minutes of the University Board Meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2020**

**Resolved:** That the Reserved and Unreserved Minutes of the University Board Meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2020 were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

**UB895. Matters Arising from the University Board Meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2020**

There were no matters arising.

## **UB896. Vice-Chancellor's Report**

Professor Baldwin presented his report. A copy of the report is set out in the Minute Book.

Professor Baldwin advised that, as the current climate of uncertainty continued to impact upon the sector and UCLan, he proposed to comment on developments and changes which had already occurred in the short time since he had prepared his latest report.

### ***(i) Covid 19***

The impact of Covid 19 continued to be a significant factor in most of the challenges facing the University. During the latest lockdown, there had been more students on campus at UCLan (and at institutions in the sector in general) than in previous lockdowns. Thus, the challenge to provide 'Covid secure' environments at all sites had had to be addressed. It is not expected that off-site students will now return to campus before 8<sup>th</sup> March 2021. In the interim, the University is making provision for priority categories (students on practical courses, final year, one year Post graduates etc). With the number of Covid cases on campus remaining very low, the University's safeguards appear to have been effective. Cases on campus were the result of transmission from home.

The Covid testing regime in place ensures that all returning students and staff are systematically tested via a very efficient on campus process which is expected to be in place until the end of March 2021. The testing system is under considerable pressure, and a number of positive cases have been identified.

The on campus facilities and systems are functioning effectively as a result of the tremendous efforts of staff.

The key objective is to ensure that students safely achieve their learning outcomes, and either progress within UCLan or successfully graduate and obtain employment. This continues to require constant attention from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and her team of academic managers. In addition, there continues to be a focus on student hardship and mental health, with consistent input by the Student Support team. The University has also recognised issues relating to student accommodation charges and has responded by applying rent rebates (equivalent to 7 weeks rental) plus free accommodation for four weeks at academic year end. Some private landlords have also responded positively and, judging by the uptake, these measures have been well received by UCLan's students.

National news has covered demands by students for tuition fee reductions. Whilst it is acknowledged that delivery of the core teaching and learning service has been very different, the move to blended delivery has presented significant extra costs to the University. The transition to on-line delivery has been costly and other measures have been introduced to ensure that on-line learning meets student expectations. In any event, and taking into account the Student Loans system, reductions to tuition fees would be far from straightforward to implement and the step would be unlikely to benefit most students. At UCLan creative use of the hardship fund grant (£330,000) from the Government is proving to be effective in supporting students, and it is understood that more such funding will be made available to universities.

**Reserved Minute - Text Redacted.**

### ***(ii) Sector Update***

(a) Office for Students – Teaching Funding letter

The annual letter indicates the Government's priority areas in the teaching delivered by the HE sector. The total grant to the sector is £70m lower than in the previous year, with a number of changes to bandings. London weighting has been removed and capital funds will be allocated via a bidding process.

**(b) Post Qualification Admissions**

The University will be responding to the consultation invitation.

**(c) Skills for Jobs FE White Paper**

Account will be taken of the White Paper as the new UCLan Strategic Plan is developed.

**(d) Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF)**

The Government's response indicates that the TEF will continue to be used, although the Gold/Silver/Bronze rankings will be dropped along with subject-level testing.

**(e) Post-18 Education and Funding Review (Augar Review)**

The reported response from the Government does not seem to address all issues raised in the Augar Review. There remain concerns about possible measures to control student numbers. Such measures could be detrimental to UCLan's widening participation mission.

***(iii) Industrial Relations and Staff Costs Reduction***

The University's intention to effect 6.5 staff post reductions via compulsory redundancy was met by the seemingly inevitable trade union response including a UCU ballot of academic staff for industrial action. The unions were aware that the University had managed, as a result of diligent and creative work by the H.R. Team, to reduce the number of exposed posts from 65 down to 6.5 only. It was also recognised that the posts at risk were in areas where student numbers had consistently declined.

***(iv) UK Funded Student Places on Medical Courses***

Expectations remained high that the University's lobbying will result in the desired increases to places for domestic students on medical courses at UCLan.

***(v) University Name Change***

The University currently awaits a response to the most recent communication on the request for a name change.

***(vi) New Strategic Plan***

Following consultations across the University, the feedback is now being evaluated. A new in-house Skills Working Party will contribute to the process. A final draft of the new Plan is expected to be available for Board consideration in the Spring.

***(vii) UCAS 2020 End of Cycle Report***

UCLan is recorded as having had a positive year. The sector in general had seen growth in health-related and STEM subject provisions.

In the discussion which followed the Vice-Chancellor's report, the following points were covered:

Dr Ion suggested that, with regard to the Medical courses places, it may be worth exploring the privately funded demand for medical training. There is little doubt that there is a demand in the UK for more trained medical professionals, and UCLan undoubtedly has the capacity to provide many more places. In noting Dr Ion's suggestion, Professor Baldwin confirmed his expectation that more places will be allocated to UCLan, particularly as geographical location is likely to be an influential factor which should work in UCLan's favour. The University had, of course, trained overseas students on its medical courses in the past.

Mrs Lowry asked about arrangements for the sharing of new 'teaching solutions' which are being created/discovered. Dr Livesey advised on the role of the Centre for Collaborative Learning, including its oversight of delivery and innovation in teaching. In addition, the regular meetings with the Heads of School provide a productive forum for updates on and sharing of good practice.

Ms Chikh confirmed that the Students Union had heard from students who were having problems with on-line learning and that the University's positive actions in response to this matter have been well received. Ms Chikh also asked about plans for ensuring that, in those subject areas where student numbers were declining, existing students still obtained a positive experience. Professor Baldwin recognised the concern, but assured the Board that all steps continued to be taken, including via the course review process, so as to ensure as buoyant and as vibrant a student experience as possible, with no negative impact on students on courses with declining numbers.

Mrs Lloyd asked about the challenges which international students might currently face, both on campus and in travelling to the UK, given the Home Office requirements around financial self-sufficiency. Professor Baldwin reported that the challenges had been recognised and that the University, in liaison with local groups, had acted to stave off any detrimental consequences. Complimentary provisions had been provided (including over the Christmas period) and other forms of hardship support have been effectively delivered so as to protect all students as best as possible.

#### **Reserved Minute – Text Redacted.**

The Board noted Professor Baldwin's confirmation that the compulsory redundancies process would continue notwithstanding the threat of industrial action.

In response to Mr Hext's suggestions about 'employability packages' for graduates, Professor Baldwin confirmed that UCLan recognised that its students expected to enhance their employment prospects by gaining qualifications at the University. The University aimed to continue to provide support and guidance, including after graduation.

The Chair thanked Professor Baldwin and his team for their continuing commitment to ensuring that the University functions effectively in the current circumstances. The Chair also thanked Board members for their contributions to the leadership of the University.

**Resolved:** That the Vice-Chancellor's Update Report be received.

#### **UB897. Annual Financial Return (AFR) 2019/20**

Mr Charles presented his report on the draft Annual Financial Return (AFR) for 2019-20. A copy of the report is set out in the Minute Book.

Mr Charles reported that the draft AFR had been examined at the Resources Committee meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2021. Mr Edney confirmed that, having reviewed and discussed the

draft AFR, the Resources Committee had recommended to the Board that the return should be approved and submitted.

**Reserved Minute – Text Redacted.**

The University had already submitted an initial response to the OfS, pending the Board's consideration of the full return. Elsewhere in the sector, many institutions had been unable to meet the submission deadlines.

**Reserved Minute - Text Redacted.**

**Resolved:** That the 2019-20 Annual Financial Return be approved for submission to the OfS.

*(Mr Hext left the meeting at this point)*

**UB898. Committee Chairs' Update**

**Resources Committee**

**Reserved Minute – Text Redacted.**

The AFR and TRAC returns had been examined and approved for submission. Consideration of the University's current procurement arrangements had culminated in a request for University management to investigate scope for more flexibility to ensure that 'best value' is always secured.

The Committee had approved the appointment of Mr Taylor (Board Chair) to the Board of Alusid Limited (UCLan spin-out company), and Mrs McCarthy and Mr McQueen had agreed to assist Mr Lee and the University's HR Team in a review of key human resources policies and processes.

Progress on the Masterplan had been monitored, with no concerns identified, and the annual Cyber Security report had provided much reassurance.

**Audit Committee**

Mrs Lowry (Chair of Audit Committee) reported on the matters covered by the Audit Committee at the meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2021.

In the 'Matters to be considered in the absence of the auditors' section of the agenda, consideration was given to performance monitoring (KPIs) arrangements. The meeting then went on to examine the latest version of the Institutional Risk Register and, under the Internal Audit section of the agenda, there was considerable interest in the outcomes from the recent audit of the University's 'Culture'. Following this 'advisory' review, the Vice-Chancellor and Mr Lee are taking forward the advice offered and taking this into account as appropriate in the development of the new Strategic Plan. The audit of the University's Research Framework had resulted in four action points and positive assurance. The Committee also received some useful insights from Dr A L Holden (Director of Research and Enterprise).

Alterations to the content and timing of audits in the 2020-21 Plan had been approved. Finally, the Committee had noted that inroads had been made into a backlog of long-standing audit actions. Now only a small number of such actions remains and these are expected to be completed in the near future. The Committee was reassured by the attention which Dr Livesey is ensuring is given to remedial work on issues following the 2019/20 audit of Degree Apprenticeships.

**Resolved:** That the Chairs' Updates be noted.

#### **UB899. Institutional Risk Register**

Professor Baldwin confirmed that, as reported by Mrs Lowry (UB898 above), the contents of the latest version of the Institutional Risk Register had been reviewed by the Audit Committee on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2021.

The Risk Register continues to be routinely reviewed by the Vice-Chancellor's Group (VCG), and the process gives attention to the need for new and emerging issues to be recognised and incorporated in the Register, with appropriate mitigatory measures agreed and assigned.

The VCG is also currently taking into account the ongoing advisory review of the institution's 'risk maturity' standing. This entails discussions with the Internal Auditor's risk specialists.

Dr Livesey then summarised the latest updates to the current version of the Register. As might be anticipated, the Covid pandemic pervades virtually all considerations.

In response to Mrs Darby-Walker's question about the ongoing development of the new Strategic Plan, the Chair and Professor Baldwin confirmed that the process took into account the messages from the Risk Register.

**Resolved:** That the Institutional Risk Register report be noted.

#### **UB900. Reserved Minute – Text Redacted.**

#### **UB901. Masterplan Delivery Update**

Mr Ahern presented the Masterplan Delivery Update report dated 4<sup>th</sup> February 2021. A copy of the report is set out in the Minute Book.

Mr Ahern advised that the current report reflected the impact of the Covid pandemic to-date. Those impacts had been managed effectively, although attention was still having to be given where the pandemic was being used as an excuse for poor performance in the supply chain.

The handover date for the Student Centre is 6<sup>th</sup> April 2021 which should allow for an impressive and fully operational introduction into usage in September 2021.

Progress on the Highways element continues, with contractors responding positively where quality control issues have to be raised.

The University is proud that the arrangements for Covid combatting work in the Engineering Innovation Centre are now recognised as the premier laboratory-testing facility in the UK.

In echoing the Chair's expectation that the new facilities will impress students and staff returning to the Preston Campus, Dr Ion and Mrs Lloyd urged that the new developments should be capitalised upon in marketing and recruitment terms. Mrs Connor agreed and confirmed that the University's commitment to supporting students represented a major point for exploitation.

Finally, Mr Ahern agreed with Mrs Darby-Walker's suggestion that, in some ways, the pandemic and lockdown had worked to the University's advantage during the Masterplan delivery process. Concerns about negative publicity had not materialised.

**Resolved :** That the Masterplan Update Report be noted.

## **UB902. Climate Emergency Framework and Action Plan**

Mr Ahern provided a verbal update on the University's actions and plans.

Mr Ahern pointed to the University's performance against recognised climate control indicators, including a 37% drop in carbon emissions since 2013 and waste water reduction by 25%. Only renewable-source electricity is now used. He listed a range of measures and innovations in recent years, including combined heating systems, wood biomass use, solar/thermal systems, water supplies via bore-holes, new toilet systems and wind turbines (at Westlakes).

Operational changes included measures to reduce the use of printers and more strategic timetabling of buildings occupancy.

The new University Strategy will feature 'sustainability' and 'wellbeing' prominently, reflecting the VCG's commitments to advances in those areas. Visible and measurable improvements will be scheduled for operation by 2024 and 2025.

A new internal body will drive the Framework forward, with representation from the Students Union, the AMRC and the East Lancashire Chamber of Commerce. Board members' input to the new group would also be welcomed. A receptiveness to learning from best practices elsewhere will be a key feature of the new group.

The Chair thanked Mr Ahern for his report. He confirmed that whereas in the past climate and sustainability issues had tended only to be incidental considerations in the University's plans, his recent conversations with Professor Baldwin had confirmed that such matters will henceforth be fundamental features throughout the planning and development processes. The Chair's discussions with Mrs Lloyd had likewise recognised the need for climate control and sustainability matters to feature more prominently in the Board's deliberations.

With the above discussions and intentions in mind, the Chair proposed that a new ad hoc working group should be created and should operate under the leadership of Mrs Lloyd. Mr Edney, Dr Ion and Mrs McCarthy indicated their willingness to join the new sub-group. Ms Chikh confirmed that the Students Union would be very pleased to participate. She reminded the Board that 48% of UCLan's students live in the local area around the University. Other Board members were asked to notify Mr Fisher of their interest.

Mrs Lloyd agreed that immediate commitment and involvement by UCLan was now imperative. She commented on reported Government intentions and expectations (eg UK to be carbon-neutral by 2050) and suggested that the UN Climate Change Conference (COP 26) in Scotland in November 2021 provided a point around which UCLan might centre its campaigns and efforts. She also pointed out that the endeavours would translate into business opportunities and other opportunities for students, staff and research. Initial outlays (costs) might be unavoidable, but the punitive taxation consequences of 'no action' could not be ignored.

Mr Ahern confirmed that UCLan aimed to be carbon neutral (Scopes 1 and 2) by 2028. Liaisons with local businesses were expected to be key factors to progress.

### **Resolved:** That

- (i) the report on Climate Emergency Framework and Action Plan be noted, and
- (ii) a new working group be created to support and advise the Chief Information and Infrastructure Officer, the new group to be chaired by Mrs Lloyd and to include Ms Chikh, Mr Edney, Dr Ion and Mrs McCarthy in its initial membership.

### **UB903. Any Other Business**

#### **(i) Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) – Board Member lead**

Mr Fisher reminded Board members that the VCG had previously indicated that the nomination of a Board member as 'EDI lead' would be most appreciated. Mrs Norris had indicated her preparedness to act as the Board's EDI lead.

**Resolved:** That Mrs Norris be appointed as the Board's EDI lead.

#### **(ii) Cyber Security**

In response to Mrs Lloyd's question about current cyber security arrangements at the University, Mr Ahern summarised the contents of the detailed Annual Report on Cyber Security which had recently been presented to and considered by the Resources Committee. Mr Ahern confirmed that, through staff vigilance and the installation of effective defence systems, the constant stream of cyber attacks (including delayed 'seeded' attacks) had been successfully fended off. Other institutions had not been so successful in this regard. Close work with security providers continues while the University and the sector remains at risk. This allows UCLan at least to make itself as difficult a target as possible in this context.

Mr Edney requested that the Cyber Report considered by his Committee should be distributed to Board members.

### **UB904. Date and Time of Next Meeting**

The next Board meeting will be on Thursday, 25<sup>th</sup> March 2021 at 10.00am via Microsoft Teams.

**I M Fisher  
Clerk to the Board**