

**University of Central Lancashire**  
**Unreserved Minutes of the Board Meeting Held on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2021 commencing at 10.00am**

**Present (via video-conference):**

David Taylor (Chair)

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

**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)

**UB905. Welcome and Apologies**

The Chair welcomed all present to the meeting.

There were no apologies for absence.

**UB906. Declaration of Interests**

There were no declarations of interests other than those recorded under UB915 below.

**UB907. Chair's Announcements**

In thanking all present for their on-line attendance, the Chair advised that he intended discussing with the Vice Chancellor and the VCG the prospects for a safe return to traditional, on campus meetings of the Board and its Committees, with the video conference option available for those who prefer, if possible in time for the May 2021 meeting of the Board.

It was agreed that such a return to 'meetings in person' would be a welcome option.

**UB908. Reserved and Unreserved Minutes of the University Board Meeting held on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2021**

**Resolved:** That the Reserved and Unreserved Minutes of the University Board Meeting held on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2021 were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

**UB909. Matters Arising from the University Board Meeting held on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2021**

**(i) UB902 - Climate Emergency Framework and Action Plan**

Mrs Lloyd confirmed that arrangements for the new Working Group to commence deliberations had proceeded. Mr Fisher advised that proposed dates for the inaugural meeting of the Group would be notified to Group members as soon as the Chief Infrastructure and Information Officer's availability had been confirmed.

**UB910. Vice-Chancellor's Report**

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

Professor Baldwin commented on his report as follows:

*(i) Students returning to campus*

Students have been present on campus (mainly Health/Medical subjects) since January 2021, but from 8 March 2021 significantly more students have returned to campus and, depending on the Government's announcements, there will be a return to campus for most of the remaining students/courses after Easter 2021. The Government's expectations have not yet been clarified, although it does seem to have been generally accepted that university campuses are relatively 'Covid-safe' environments. There remains the concern, however, that transmission *beyond the campus* by students represents a significant risk.

The Covid-testing facility on campus has worked particularly effectively and consideration is being given to extending the provision beyond the current contracted period.

*(ii) Reserved Minute - Text Redacted*

*(iii) Reserved Minute - Text Redacted*

*(iv) Student Hardship*

Nearly all of the £1.2m provided to UCLan by the Central Government has now been allocated. The University will now earmark a further £400,000 from its own funds to alleviate student hardship. Further refunds of student accommodation charges have been agreed and the University will continue to provide free food and refreshments for students up to the end of the examinations period (21<sup>st</sup> May 2021).

*(v) Academic Matters*

- The Curriculum Framework review is under way.

- A new 'Course Health Dashboard' is being developed. This will assist in ensuring that the University is in a positive position to deflect criticisms of courses considered as being 'low value'.
- The ESFA's routine auditing of Degree Apprenticeships records and funding entitlement is expected to recommence nationally on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021. This is an area where many universities have struggled to comply (with complex funding and administration requirements), but the position at UCLan is being comprehensively reviewed and improved so as to reduce exposure to funding clawback risk.
- The University is confident that the REF2021 (Research Excellence Framework) submission will be recognised as being significantly stronger than the previous submission.
- The results from the first Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) are still awaited following an embargo on their release.

*(vi) Reserved Minute - Text Redacted*

*(vii) Reserved Minute - Text Redacted*

*(viii) Graduation Ceremony*

Graduation Ceremony arrangements are being planned for a two-week period in September 2021. This will cater mainly for 2020/21 graduands. Arrangements to accommodate some level of families and friends participation are expected to be included.

Finally, Professor Baldwin drew attention to the extensive record of UCLan successes included at the end of his report.

*Reserved Minute - Text*

Ms Chikh was pleased to note the report's update on developments at UCLan's Burnley Campus. She asked whether a specific budget had been assigned to help Burnley Campus students during the forthcoming examinations period. Professor Baldwin explained that, rather than assign an earmarked amount of funding for Burnley Campus students, the needs of students at Burnley will be managed within the overall budget and arrangements for the University.

The Chair thanked Professor Baldwin and his team for their continuing commitment to ensuring that the University functions effectively in the current circumstances, and not least in response to the cyber attack.

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

#### **UB911. Reserved Minute - Text Redacted**

#### **UB912. Chief Finance Officer's Update**

Mr Charles presented his Finance Report dated March 2021. He also provided a slide presentation to highlight the key points in his report. Copies of the report and the slides are set out in the Minute Book.

Mr Charles drew attention to the following points.

*- Financial Regulations and Supporting Documents*

The Resources Committee had reviewed and then approved a set of supporting documents (Financial Regulations Operational Guidance documents (FROGs) and other key policies/documents) which, together with the overarching Financial Regulations themselves, now provide the University with an up-to-date and comprehensive set of regulations and guidance. The input from and questioning by the Resources Committee members had made important contributions to the process.

*- Reserved Minute - Text Redacted*

Mr Hext suggested that the Finance Report confirmed excellent ongoing performance by Mr Charles and his team and by the VCG.

The Chair thanked Mr Charles and the VCG for their continuing attention to the University's financial performance.

**Resolved:** That the Finance Report be received.

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

### **UB913. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion - Annual Report**

Dr Livesey presented the Annual Report on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion for 2019-20. A copy of the Annual Report is set out in the Minute Book.

Dr Livesey reminded the Board that the Annual Report serves to summarise the EDI work performed by the University in the previous year. Publishing the Annual Report (on the University's website by 31<sup>st</sup> March each year) is a legal requirement.

Dr Livesey confirmed that the Annual Report had been scrutinised at the recent meeting of the Resources Committee. The Resources Committee had resolved to recommend approval of the Report to the Board.

In commenting on the highlights and trends which demonstrate UCLan's commitment to EDI, Dr Livesey advised that the establishment of the Director of EDI post and the subsequent contribution of Mr Pradeep Passi in that post had been key factors in progression of UCLan's inclusive Mission and Values.

The data in the Report indicates where future attention needs to be focused, including the need for closer balance between the staff profile and the make-up of the communities served. Also, student attainment gaps need to be addressed. UCLan continues to be ahead of the HE sector in many regards, but there is a determination to achieve further EDI progress and to avoid any degree of complacency. The University's action plans also take account of the OfS's targets.

Mrs Norris agreed that the 2019/20 Annual Report indicates a very sound basis from which the University's EDI objectives might be further advanced. She felt that the Annual Report would be further enhanced by a comment on the University Board make-up and reaffirmation of the Board's aim to achieve suitable diversity in its own membership. Dr Livesey undertook to add an appropriate section to cover this.

Mrs Darby-Walker recommended that regular checks on terminology used should be carried out, given that this was an area of regular changes and great sensitivity. Although

confident that colleagues working on the University's behalf were alive to the terminology concerns, Dr Livesey undertook to remind colleagues about this expectation.

Ms Chikh undertook to circulate a useful document (produced by 'Sporting Equals') offering up-to-date advice on terminology such as 'BAME' which is no longer considered to be an appropriate term to use.

Ms Chikh also confirmed that much progress was being achieved between the Student Union and Mr Passi and his team. She added that a review of the Honorary Fellowship nomination process might be expected to produce increased diversity of candidates.

**Resolved:** That the Annual Report on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion for 2019-20 be approved.

#### **UB914. University Staff Survey 2021**

Mr Lee presented his report on the Staff Survey which had been conducted in January-February 2021. A copy of the report is set out in the Minute Book.

Mr Lee confirmed that, considering that the survey had had to be conducted under lockdown conditions, the 74% response rate was very pleasing. Analysis of all the response data had allowed the VCG to conclude that the broad messages from the survey were generally reassuring. In particular, the improvement on staff perceptions of the VCG's own performance was reassuring to note.

Issues around the 'work-life balance' for many staff had been noted, as had the rather stark variances within that subject between separate areas of the University. Subsets of the survey data will now be shared with line management across the University in order that responses to the messages from the survey might be developed.

At VCG, it is expected that attention will be directed to the work-life balance and work-load messages, particularly given the return to working on campus context. VCG will also pick up on staff preference for 'visibility' and face-to-face interaction with senior staff. This had begun to be successfully addressed prior to the pandemic lockdown interruptions.

Mrs Lowry agreed that the broad indications of staff coping with the pandemic turmoil and staff preparing for returning to work were both positive and reassuring messages. She wondered how VCG ensured that there was effective follow-up and action by line management across the institution.

Mr Lee agreed that there needed to be improvements to the survey follow-up processes and he suggested how arrangements at VCG for systematic reporting on 'response to survey' might be incorporated into the VCG's processes.

**Resolved:** That the report on the University Staff Survey be noted.

#### **UB915. Reserved Minute - Text Redacted**

#### **UB916. Committee Chairs' Update**

##### **Resources Committee**

Mr Edney (Chair of Resources Committee) reported on the matters covered by the Resources Committee at the meetings on 5<sup>th</sup> February and 8<sup>th</sup> March 2021. He confirmed

that many of the matters reviewed by the Resources Committee had already been addressed earlier in today's Board meeting under the agenda items on the University's budget and financial controls, pensions and the Annual Report on EDI. The Committee's monitoring of Masterplan progress will be covered later in the agenda.

The Committee had also noted University Management's plans for responding to the cyber attack (6/7 March 2021) and for minimising the likelihood of such breaches in the future.

Mr Edney confirmed that the University's operations in Cyprus continued to receive the Committee's attention.

In commending University Management for the breadth and quality of recent reports, Mr Edney confirmed that the work on the new Financial Regulations and on Debt Financing (in which he would continue to be directly involved as Chair of the Committee) was proceeding.

### **Governance, Risk and Nominations Committee**

The Chair of the Board, who is also Chair of the new Governance, Risk and Nominations Committee, confirmed that at that Committee's inaugural meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2021, note had been taken of the University's arrangements for meeting its general obligations towards the OfS and that arrangements for compliance with the OfS's requirement for a review of Consumer Law compliance had also been endorsed.

The Committee had also considered the University's Value for Money Statement and had reviewed Risk Management arrangements. Arrangements for the next Independent Governance Review had been considered. The discussion on succession planning and the recruitment of new members had covered the need to identify further financial expertise for the Audit Committee.

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

### **UB917. Academic Board - Update from Meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2021**

Dr Ion reported that the key points considered at the Academic Board meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2021 were as follows:

- Assurance Reports

These were generally very good and were validated through a very thorough process. The process would benefit from the inclusion of commentaries on any areas of concern in the reports.

- Student Experience

In broad terms, it seemed that students at the Preston and Burnley campuses generally enjoy a very positive 'student experience'. By contrast, there would appear to be more work required so as to assure as good an experience for students at the Westlakes campus, and one way forward may involve collaboration with other providers in that area. Professor Baldwin agreed that the Westlakes position needs to be reviewed.

- Course Planning

Although a good number of courses have been dispensed with, many of the changes have related more to courses consolidation and/or to the titling of courses.

Mrs Lloyd confirmed that Dr Ion's reported covered the key issues addressed by the Academic Board.

The Chair thanked Dr Ion for her report.

#### **UB918. Independent Governance Review**

Mr Fisher confirmed that, as reported by the Chair above, arrangements for the next Independent Governance Review had been considered at the Governance, Risk and Nominations Committee on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2021.

Mr Fisher reminded the Board that recognised 'best practice' required regular and independent scrutiny of the institution's top-level governance arrangements. The task is often undertaken by audit firms or legal firms, but the Committee had agreed that persons familiar with OfS and CUC expectations might also be drawn from further afield and thus he would commence an appropriate process of initial contacts with a view to providing the Committee with suitable candidates from whom to select. Mr Fisher added that, with a new governance structure only recently put in place at UCLan, a review of the new arrangements would be very timely.

**Resolved:** That the arrangements proposed for the next Independent Governance Review be endorsed.

#### **UB919. Masterplan Delivery Update**

Mr Ahern presented the Masterplan Delivery Update report dated 12<sup>th</sup> March 2021. A copy of the report is set out in the Minute Book.

Mr Ahern confirmed that the programme continued to run well, with the major challenges which had occurred in the course of the programme now all effectively managed. The Student Centre is now being internally equipped and furnished with hand-over in April 2021 meaning that all should be ready for student usage by September 2021. Likewise, the Highways element of the Masterplan is proceeding to a most satisfactory conclusion. All is being achieved within budget, with continuing good relations with contractors being a key contributor to successful delivery. An underspend on budget will also now allow for completion of the 'spine-work' across the campus. Mr Ahern drew attention to the many pictures in the report. The 'natural' finishes to be used will be consistent with the drive for both sustainability and a 'healthy campus'. The 'high quality ribbon' across the campus will also address some existing aspects of the campus which are in need of improvement, and all the developments might be expected to produce a very positive effect on the 'student experience' at UCLan.

Finally, Mr Ahern commented on possible new development work with Lancashire County Council and Preston City County entailing city centre refurbishment and a rail link to Cottam.

Ms Chikh confirmed that the emerging Student Centre was a most impressive addition to the campus. She suggested that measures to avoid 'silo effect' might need to be considered. Mr Ahern agreed that, while students often expect to find a 'home area' for

their particular course/studies, there also need to be strategies and developments which will ensure an appropriate level of overall integration and a 'bringing together' of the different areas and types of provision. To a great extent, the new Student Centre will achieve integration, and the closer linking of (currently separated) areas is also planned. A 'health and sport on campus' drive is also designed to bring about integration.

In commenting on the Government's Towns Fund investment and the Town Fund Strategic Board in Preston, the Chair was pleased to confirm that the need for major upgrading of the Friargate area of the city had been recognised. He outlined some of the upgrading proposals which are already under consideration. The Chair expected that UCLan would make a proactive contribution to the transformation process.

Mrs Darby-Walker asked about Preston's prospects as a City of Culture applicant. The Chair advised on Lancashire County Council's 'Digital City of Culture' bidding intentions. This would cover Preston and would potentially make a huge difference if successful.

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

## **UB920. Any Other Business**

### **(i) Freedom of Speech on University Campuses**

Having attended a recent CUC conference, Dr Armstrong suggested that, despite the impressions often created by the media and by some politicians, no real problems had been identified. However, individual institutions were advised to continue to monitor all on campus events and activities.

The Chair suggested that, once circumstances allow the Board to resume its practice of having topical and strategic discussions in addition to ordinary Board meetings, 'freedom of speech' would be a suitable topic for inclusion.

### **(ii) Mrs Maria Darby-Walker**

The Chair advised that, with her maximum term of office as a Board member about to expire, the University would shortly lose the services of one of its liveliest contributors in recent years, Mrs Maria Darby-Walker.

All concurred with the Chair's sadness at the loss of Mrs Darby-Walker's services and it was agreed that, as soon as circumstances allow, a dinner should be arranged to mark Mrs Darby-Walker's departure and as a token of appreciation of her services as a Board Member since 2016.

Mrs Darby-Walker confirmed that she had enjoyed her time as a Board member and that she would miss the company of many of the friends she had made at UCLan. She proposed to remain in touch with the University and felt that she was leaving the governance and management of UCLan in very capable hands.

All thanked Mrs Darby-Walker and wished her well for the future.

### **(iii) Chair's Closing Comments**

On behalf of the Board, the Chair thanked all present for their continuing contribution to the effective management of the University during these particularly demanding times.



**UB921. Date and Time of Next Meeting**

Since it seemed unlikely that circumstances would allow the usual May away days arrangement for the next meeting of the Board, it was agreed that arrangements for an ordinary meeting of the Board at 10.00am on Friday, 21<sup>st</sup> May 2021 should proceed.

**I M Fisher**  
**Clerk to the Board**