

LUMINATE EDUCATION GROUP

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE UNIVERSITY CENTRE LEEDS BOARD HELD ON MONDAY 24 JUNE 2024

Present

Aisha Ali (from item 6)	Co-optee
Brian Culleton	Co-optee
Mark Garratt (Chair)	Governor
Katie Miller	Co-optee
Reece Longden	Student member
Rod Peet	Co-optee

The quorum for the meeting was three members (including at least one governor)

In Attendance

Matt Burton (to item 10)	Interim Group Director of Marketing and Student Recruitment
Charlotte Catmull	Staff Board Member Elect (observing)
Rebecca Fores (from item 10)	Associate Dean
Eleanor Harris	Governance Manager
Bill Jones	Deputy CEO and Executive Principal
Sarah Marquez	Dean of HE
Allison Mortimer	Student Board Member Elect (observing)
Gemma Simmons-Blench (from item 6)	Deputy CEO, Curriculum & Quality
Joanne Tyssen	Director of HE Quality and Standards
Paul Ward	Group Head of Finance Business Partnering
David Warren	Group Vice Principal Development
Joe Wilson	Principal, Leeds Conservatoire

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 Brian Culleton who had joined the board as a co-opted member. The board heard that David Tipple had stepped down as staff board member and welcomed Charlotte Catmull to the meeting, who would be joining the board as Staff Board Member and was attending this meeting as an observer. The board also noted that this would be Reece Longden's final meeting as Student Board member and welcomed Allison Mortimer who would join the board from July. The board thanked both David and Reece for their contributions during their terms.

Apologies for absence were recorded from Javaad Alipoor (Co-optee), Colin Booth (Group CEO and Governor) 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 11 March 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. The next meeting in November would take place at the Mabgate campus and include a tour of the site of the new UCLeeds building.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the board held on 11 March 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

The Chair updated the board on the discussions and key decisions from the April meeting of the Group Board, which included the approval of the Group Strategic Priorities for 2024/25, the proposed contracting arrangements for Harrogate College and Pudsey Sixth Form College construction projects, the Group Data Protection policy and a revised Luminate contract of employment, which is intended for eventual use for all staff across the group.

5b) Student Member Update

The student board member explained that the Student Union elections took place throughout March, with a high turnout of voters. New student officers had been elected across the group, including the election of Allison Mortimer as HE Student Officer. The student board member had also attended the NUS conference in April, where the challenges facing HE in FE across the sector was a key point of discussion. The board heard that much of the SU activity since March had been focused on preparing end of year activities and celebrations for students and handover and induction for the new HE Student Officer.

5c) Link Governor Feedback

The Chair explained that, in his capacity as Link Governor for Marketing, he had met with the Interim Group Director of Marketing and Student Recruitment to discuss branding and marketing at UCLeeds and the feedback from this meeting had been incorporated into the presentation to be given later on the agenda.

The Link Governor for Access and Participation informed the board that she had met with the Director of HE Quality and Standards and HE Widening Participation and Outreach Manager to discuss access and participation arrangements at UCLeeds. The Link Governor was assured by the level of strategic commitment to access and participation and the amount of positive work being undertaken in this area by a relatively small team of staff. There are also plans for the Link Governor to attend the next meeting of the Widening Participation committee and to participate in the UCLeeds Women in Leadership event next year. The full feedback report from the visit is available in the governor portal.

PART 2 – STRATEGY, POLICY AND RISK MANAGEMENT

6. Strategic Deep Dive: UCLeeds Student Recruitment, Marketing and Branding Update

The Interim Group Director of Student Recruitment and Marketing gave a presentation to the board outlining the current student recruitment position and future marketing and branding plans for UCLeeds. The board heard that as of 1 June, applications were down by

29% compared to last year. However, it was explained that this is partly accounted for by a change in the way students progressing from Level 5 to Level 6 are processed, as these students are now given an immediate offer rather than being asked to re-apply. In addition, a number of Level 4 programmes are no longer being offered. The board also heard that there has been a 10% decrease in the number of internal applications from Level 3 FE programmes within the group compared to last year, in spite of additional conversation activities in this area. However, the board was assured that perceptions work is being undertaken with Level 3 students and targets related to internal progression to HE have been included for each of the FE colleges this year to try and increase the proportion of internal applications received. It was confirmed that the process for offer making on SITS has improved, which it was hoped would speed up the processing time for applications.

Although applications were reported to be lower this year, the board heard that the number of acceptances at Level 4 remains the same as the previous year and the number of applicants placing UCLeeds as their insurance has increased. The board questioned whether the marketing team held any data regarding which institutions those applicants who put UCLeeds as their insurance were selecting as their first choice. It was expected that these were mostly other local HE providers. However, the Interim Group Director of Student Recruitment and Marketing undertook to explore this further outside of the meeting and report back to the board.

The board went on to discuss the branding for UCLeeds, which had been established in 2019 in an attempt to separate the brand from Leeds City College (LCC). It was explained that having a distinct brand and identity is important for international and external applications, although internal applications had been higher when UCLeeds was more closely aligned to LCC. The board heard that as a result, the marketing team is carrying out a perceptions survey to understand whether re-establishing a closer link to LCC would be beneficial. However, the board also noted that the timing of the rebrand and launch had been impacted by Covid-19 and a major cyber attack on the group in 2020 which may have resulted in a lack of understanding of the UCLeeds brand in the sector as a whole.

The board was hopeful that the new campus at Mabgate would create heightened appeal for conversion both internally and externally and agreed that the opening of the new building, along with the launch of the new curriculum should be capitalised on as a marketing opportunity. The new building offers a chance to rebrand or relaunch UCLeeds, but the Interim Group Director of Student Recruitment and Marketing advised that the group first needs to understand the current level of brand recognition and key target areas for growth (internal, local external and international). The board was assured that a master plan is being developed for the Mabgate site, which will see a collaborative approach to adult education being developed for both FE and HE.

The board agreed that the development of marketing and branding at UCLeeds should continue to be discussed with and monitored by the Link Governor for Marketing.

7. Dean's Report

a) UCLeeds Activity Update

The Dean of HE explained that the Curriculum Development Project is progressing well, with staff across all areas of the curriculum engaging with employers to develop programmes based on employer needs. The project aims to look beyond the current expertise within UCLeeds and upskill staff to ensure curriculum can be developed in line with employer expectations.

The board heard that UCLeeds is leading on a Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF) project on behalf of the group with West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA), which looks at the curriculum across FE and HE to identify skills gap needs in the Financial and Professional Services (FPS) sector. As a result of this project the Luminate FPS Skills Report has been launched which makes several recommendations regarding education

and industry. Resource and capital funding have also been received to set up a regional centre for skills development in the financial sector.

Following a pre-licence visit which took place in February, it was reported that UCLeeds' application for a Student Sponsor Licence has been refused due to issues identified around record keeping, recruitment practices and migrant tracking and monitoring. Whilst this outcome would make it unlikely that international students could be recruited for the September intake, the board was assured that the changes requested were relatively minor and that a new application had already been submitted with a high degree of confidence that this would be successful.

Board members were pleased to note that the draft report from the OfS relating to UCLeeds' application for Degree Awarding Powers had been received, which had identified a number of areas of good practice. The next step would be for the report to be assessed by the OfS Quality Assurance Committee before the final outcome of the application can be confirmed. It was agreed that the final outcome of the application would be shared with board members as soon as this is known.

b) Review of UCLeeds Risk Register

The board discussed the latest updates to the UCLeeds risk register. With regard to risk *UC13 - Reduction of apprenticeship recruitment in science* it was reported that a head of HE Apprenticeships is being recruited to identify new areas of provision and increase employer engagement with the aim of improving apprenticeship numbers. Clarification was given that this role is distinct from the Group Director of Apprenticeships role and will focus exclusively on activity at UCLeeds.

RESOLVED: That the board approve updates to the risk register, including the addition of risk FB1600-16 relating to failure to gain an International Student Sponsor licence, in light of the Home Office decision discussed under item 7a above.

c) Proposed Quality Targets for 2024/25

The board reviewed the proposed quality targets for 2024/25, noting that due to the earlier timing some 2023/24 actual figures were not yet available. The board discussed the NSS targets, which aimed to maintain the current position in most areas, with the exception of student voice, learning resources and organisation and management, which aimed for modest improvement as the areas with historically the lowest scores. The board noted that the proposed recruitment target for 2024/25 maintains the 2023/24 position as no new provision is being introduced next year. It was confirmed that in subsequent years growth will be targeted as new provision is introduced. The board noted that the HR targets for 2024/25 would be circulated outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED: That the board approve the proposed quality targets for 2024/25 and recommend to group board that these be included within the group Strategic and Operational Development Plan (SODP).

d) Draft Operating Budget for 2024/25

The Group Head of Finance Business Partnering presented the draft operating budget for UCLeeds. It was explained that the budget has been set at £1.2m higher than for 2023/24, predominantly due to increased HE income as, although recruitment numbers are targeted as static for 2024/25 it is expected that income will increase due to the higher fee level approved by the board in August 2023.

The board queried why apprenticeship income was targeted to be lower in the 2024/25 budget than the current forecast, particularly in light of the planned recruitment of a new Head of HE Apprenticeships. It was explained that while the budget does not include any targeted increase in apprenticeships arising from this role, this will be a key target for this staff member.

RESOLVED: That the board approved the draft operating budget for 2024/25 and recommended to Group Board that this be consolidated within the overall budget for the group.

8. UCLeeds Skills Contribution

The board received an overview of the criteria used by Ofsted for the overall Education Inspection Framework sub-judgement linked to skills, noting that areas in scope for Ofsted at UCLeeds included professional qualifications and apprenticeships. The Dean of HE gave a presentation outlining the contribution from UCLeeds to this sub-judgement through collaboration with civic, community, education and employer stakeholder groups including extensive work with WYCA on the Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF) project related to financial and professional services (FPS) outlined under item 7a, work with Leeds City Council to provide business start up support for students and videos promoting Higher Technical Qualifications with the DfE. The board heard that UCLeeds is also leading on the establishment of college based higher education (CBHE) network comprising of over 40 CBHE providers. An important focus for UCLeeds has been on expanding the institution's employer based approach, especially in the Health Play Specialist sector, which is a very successful area of provision that has resulted in UCLeeds becoming the preferred provider for Great Ormond Street Hospital.

It was proposed that a Link Governor for Skills be appointed for each member board and the board approved June Dennis in this role, which would be incorporated within her current role as Link Governor for Curriculum Development and Innovation.

9. HE Fees and Refunds Policy

The board reviewed the HE Fees and Refunds Policy for 2025/26, it was proposed to retain fees at the 2024/25 level. The board was advised that the fee level would be reviewed again for 2026/27 when the changes to the curriculum have been implemented and the new building at Mabgate is open. Confirmation was given that fees have been benchmarked against other institutions.

RESOLVED: That the board recommend the HE Fees and Refunds Policy be approved by Group Board.

10. Update on Mabgate Development

The Deputy CEO and Executive Principal gave the board a verbal update on progress with the new building at Mabgate which was on schedule to be completed by 1 September 2025 and it was hoped would provide a boost in recruitment for UCLeeds.

With regard to the developments in the wider Mabgate campus, the board heard that the asbestos identified in the Studio 1 building had been removed but this work has slightly delayed the opening of the ESOL building. The board was assured that costs across the project are in line with budget and being closely managed. Board members expressed concern regarding the limited timeline and staff resource required for completion and were assured that the group has built additional capacity into the capital projects team in order to manage the extra workload.

PART 3 – PERFORMANCE MONITORING AND SCRUTINY

11. Financial Position Dashboard 2023/24

The Group Head of Finance Business Partnering presented the report and drew board members' attention to the new dashboard format, which was designed to give a more comprehensive view of the current financial position. The board heard that the overall year

to date position was below budget due primarily to lower than planned recruitment at the start of the year. With regard to expenditure, the board noted that there were some ongoing savings on staff costs due to a number of vacancies but these have been slightly offset by the impact of the pay award. There was also a variance in servicing costs due to some planned recharges at start of year, which did not materialise.

Overall the board noted that the EBITDA position was forecast at a £1.2m deficit which is below the budgeted EBITDA position of £1.269m surplus.

12. Quality of Education

Director of HE Quality and Standards provided the board with an overview of the quality of education performance at UCLeeds so far in the 2023/24 academic year. The board heard that retention performance remains strong, though slightly down on last year for HE programmes, due largely to interventions and student support put in place to identify students at risk at an earlier stage. Completion rates were reported to be above the OfS B3 thresholds and attendance remains high, with work regarding the cost of living and use of VLE underway to continue to improve attendance.

The board was assured that, although continuation rates for PGCE programmes are below the OfS B3 threshold, guidance is being created to help students manage workloads and expectations. Progression in all areas was also reported to be below the OfS B3 threshold. However, it was explained that this is largely a result of UCLeeds' foundation plus top up model which means students are surveyed 3 months after they have finished their top-up year, an earlier point than those on traditional HE courses.

Apprenticeship completion was reported as a best case of 73% with a number of learners past end date or at gateway. Board members were assured that any areas of apprenticeships judged to be at risk are supported through the Apprenticeship Enhancement Programme. Board members queried whether the national framework for apprenticeship data is used to monitor apprenticeships performance. It was explained that apprenticeships performance is monitored through the group's Quality Performance Review process. However, it was agreed that Brian Culleton should send the Director of HE Quality and Standards the template used at Huddersfield University for reporting on this, based on the ESFA Accountability Framework, in case it of a monitoring visit from the ESFA.

13. UCLeeds Access and Participation Plan (APP)

The Director of HE Quality and Standards presented the APP, which had been reviewed by the Link Governor for Access and Participation prior to the meeting. The board heard that in some areas more general targets had been included due to challenges with the availability of some data. The board was advised that not targets for international students had been included but if UCLeeds is successful in achieving an International Student Sponsor licence, a variation to the APP will be submitted in year.

RESOLVED: That board approve the Access and Participation Plan and recommend that Group Board approve this for submission to the OfS.

14. Update to the UCLeeds Student Protection Plan

The board reviewed the updated UCLeeds Student Protection Plan, noting that only very minor changes were proposed relating to business continuity plans and the requirements of the DAPs application.

RESOLVED: That the board approve the amendments to the Student Protection Plan

The meeting closed at 6.50pm

Signed: (Chair) Date: