

UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE HIGHER EDUCATION CORPORATION**ACADEMIC BOARD**

Minutes of the meeting of the Academic Board held on 13 November 2024.

PRESENT: Professor Quintin McKellar (Chair)

Professor Mairi Watson
Sharon Harrison-Barker
Professor Wendy Wills
Dr Charmagne Barnes
Dr Stephen Partridge
Professor Daniel McCluskey
Professor Damian Ward

Geri Ward
Rohit Mahadevu
Roxanne Garara
Dr Carolyn Devereux
Dr Joel Carlton
Dr Funlade Sunmola
Dr Amy Wells

Dr Luke Wood
Christopher Nicholas
Professor Jonathan Morris
Bethan Adams
Dr Gbanaibolou Jombo

IN ATTENDANCE:

Dr Susan Grey
Helen Davidson

Professor Frank Haddleton
Linda Goodwin

Professor Helen Barefoot

1 **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of; undergraduate student, Hamnah Baig; Dean of the Schools of Law and Education, Professor Penny Carey; Director of Marketing and Communications, Karen Chater; Senior Manager and Professional Staff representative, Chris Cooper, and Chief Information and Digital Officer, David Gillard.

The Board noted that Bethan Adams was in attendance as alternate for David Gillard.

Secretary and Registrar, Sharon Harrison-Barker; Senior Lecturer, Dr Amy Wells; Senior Lecturer, Dr Luke Wood; and Principal Lecturer, Dr Funlade Sunmola attended online via MS Teams.

2 **NEW DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, IF ANY**

There were no new declarations of interest noted.

3 **ACADEMIC BOARD STANDING ORDERS**

The Board noted the Standing Orders of the Academic Board which could be found via the link below.

https://www.herts.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/255882/2024-10-01-AB-Standing-Orders.pdf

4 **TERMS OF REFERENCE, COMPOSITION AND MEMBERSHIP**

The Chair welcomed new members of the Academic Board to their first meeting and noted amendments made to the Membership in the following Categories.

- Category 12, Professional Staff member, Chris Cooper
- Category 13, Academic Staff member, Christopher Nicholas
- Category 14, two members of Academic Staff with pedagogic expertise, Professor Jonathan Morris (nominated by the Research Committee) and Dr Jombo Gbanaiobolou (nominated by the Educational Student Experience Committee)
- Category 5, Dean of School, Dr Stephen Partridge.

The Board noted that Category 5 membership for Dean of School, Professor Damian Ward, had been extended for a further one-year term.

A vacancy remained under Category 11 for a postgraduate student nominated by the Student Representative Council.

ACTION

President of the Hertfordshire Students' Union, Rohit Mahadevu would confirm the name of the postgraduate student nominated by the Student Representative Council, to the Clerk.

(Agenda Paper 4 refers)

5 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Board received the Minutes of the meeting held on 19 June 2024 and noted a minor amendment required under Minute 7 to amend the currency to Australian (not US) dollars.

RESOLVED:

The Minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed and signed as an accurate record of the business conducted subject to the amendment noted.

(Confidential Agenda Paper 5 refers)

6 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

The Board considered a Schedule of Actions from the previous meeting and received progress updates.

Awarding Gap: Race and Ethnicity Equity Student Success (Minute 11 refers)

An update was included within the report under Agenda item 11, 'Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Students: Attainment Gap'. The action was closed.

Difficulties around timings of assessment/referral/deferral and access to student support (Minute 12 refers)

At the previous meeting it was noted there was a one-week period between the publication of Semester B results and the start of the referral/deferral assessment period. The Board noted that the requested action, that the period was lengthened to ensure students could prepare and had access to the necessary support, had been taken. It was noted that the academic year calendar had been revised and a two-week period between results on 03 June 2025 and the resits on 17 June 2025 had been confirmed. The action was closed.

Furthermore, the Educational Student Experience Committee (ESEC) had highlighted at its last meeting that there were no teaching weeks after Easter 2025 ahead of the assessment period. The Board acknowledged that ESEC had taken measures to ensure staff were advised of the requirement to organise the appropriate support for assessments before the Easter break.

UPR HR08 Professorships (Minute 15 refers)

The Board noted the issue had been resolved and that UPR HR08 had been updated and published. The action was closed.

UPR TL05 Inclusive Assessment Design (Minute 15 refers)

The Board noted that a consistent approach to time extensions for Study Needs Agreements (SNA's) had been considered and approved by ESEC and the Standing Working Party (SWP) UPRs. UPR TL05 had been published. The action was closed.

RESOLVED:

All outstanding actions were closed.

(Confidential Agenda Paper 6 refers)

7 **NATIONAL AGENDA FOR HIGHER EDUCATION**

The Board received a verbal report from the Chair.

Since the last meeting of the Academic Board in June 2024, a general election had resulted in change to a Labour government and the appointment of new Prime Minister, Keir Starmer. Bridget Phillipson was the new Secretary of State for Education, Jackie Smith was Minister for Skills, Sir Patrick Valence the Minister for Science and Peter Kyle, the new Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology. The Chair considered the appointments of Jackie Smith and Patrick Valence were generally positive for the Sector and was pleased to note at the recent Embassy Education Conference, that Bridget Phillipson had spoken positively regarding overseas students and had endorsed the graduate visa.

Looking globally, it was noted that UK overseas student recruitment might benefit from the cap on student recruitment in Australia, more stringent regulations in Canada and the election of Donald Trump in the USA.

Bills at a formative stage or passing through parliament which would potentially impact the sector and/or the University were; the Terrorism Protection of Premises Bill, the Renters Rights Bill, the Mental Health Bill, the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill, the Employment Rights Bill and the Cyber Security Resilience Bill.

A report from Sir David Behan on the Office for Students (OfS) had suggested more focus might be given to monitoring the financial sustainability of institutions, indicating that government might be receptive to a more interventionist approach than the previous government. Behan also suggested the OfS might have greater consumer enforcement powers and become the designated quality body.

Universities UK had written a Higher Education Research Commission blueprint which highlighted; financial sustainability, indexation on tuition fees, an increase in the percentage of GDP spend on research, flexibility on the Teachers' Pension Scheme, contextualisation for access, and a target of 70% of under 25's going into tertiary education.

At the Labour Party Conference, Jackie Smith indicated that universities would embrace 3 priority pillars of activity; widening access, economic growth and civic mission. There was also indication of tuition fee inflation over a 5-year period to £10,500. Changes to the Apprenticeship Levy which would offer fewer places at level 7 were signalled, which would negatively impact the University's recruitment to level 7 Masters.

Regarding the recent Budget, increases in National Insurance employers' contributions would impact the Sector pay bill by roughly £130m and the University by approximately £3m. There was little else to report for Higher Education from the Budget, however one week later, the government announced proposed tuition fee increases in line with inflation for university students across all years of study. It was hoped for tuition fee inflation by indexation year on year, which would provide stability to the Sector. According to latest figures posted in the press, roughly 80 universities across the sector had been forced to make cost savings.

An industrial strategy green paper, 'Invest 2035, the UK's Modern Industrial Strategy' had been published, which highlighted 8 growth driving sectors; advanced manufacturing, clean energy, creative industries, defence, digital and technology, financial services, life sciences and professional and business services. This was relatively positive news for the University as the areas of focus, albeit not focussed on specific industries, were areas of research strength.

8 **ANY OTHER MATTERS FOR REPORT BY THE VICE-CHANCELLOR**

There were no further matters for report.

9 ITEMS FOR REPORT FROM THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS

The Board received a verbal report from the Board of Governors academic staff representative, Dr Joel Carlton.

The October 2024 meeting of the Board welcomed the new Chair of the Board of Governors, David Sproul, who had been pleased to note the University's positive position and outlined his ambitions for an even better future. The Chair of the Board had commissioned several 'deep dive' sessions, the first of which was 'Education and Student Experience', scheduled for 26 November 2024. A Board of Governors Skills Audit Questionnaire would highlight the strengths and gaps ahead of new Governor recruitment next year, and the Board had received an update on the recruitment of a new Vice-Chancellor.

The Vice Chancellor had updated the Board of Governors on National and Sector issues in regard to the political and economic landscape.

Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor Mairi Watson updated members of the Board on the Strategic Plan 2024-2030 and outlined the six strands of activity that had been developed to deliver on the University's goals of growth in impact, global reputation, revenue and student numbers. The Board had noted that operational Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) would be developed, which would feed into Board level KPI's.

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor update the Board regarding the University's performance against each of the 9 existing Board level KPI's.

Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education and Student Experience), Dr Charmagne Barnes presented the National Student Survey analysis which had placed the University 8th in its competitor set and well above the sector mean, with a positivity score of 82.91%. The Board were informed that the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) results had seen the University ranked 5th out of 108 universities. The University's completion rate for the PTES had been well above sector average and the University had exceeded its KPI target in that regard.

The Board had also received updates on the sector league tables, home and international recruitment and the new student record system.

10 REPORT FROM THE PRO VICE-CHANCELLOR (RESEARCH & ENTERPRISE)

The Board received a report from the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research & Enterprise), Professor Wendy Wills which updated on key Research and Enterprise activities.

The Board noted the highlights in relation to;

- The integration of Research and Enterprise Services and changes to Research and Enterprise Leadership.
- Research Committee's proposal to have greater visibility and oversight of Research Centres and alignment with business planning.
- The redefinition and development of Research Themes/'Missions' which were; thinking differently about health and care; developing ideas into disruptive technologies; connecting people through story and memory; challenging the status quo; and building resilient and equitable societies.
- Research Income and Awards.
- The launch of the new Ethics System which replaced the manual system.
- Plans for the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2029 which were progressing at pace.
- The successful UKRI audit that resulted in the University achieving the highest possible grade (which gave 'substantial confidence in the University's research funding processes)
- Postgraduate numbers in the Doctoral College which had reached the largest numbers (927) ever enrolled at the University.

RESOLVED

The Board noted the report.

(Confidential Agenda Paper 10 refers)

11 **REPORT FROM THE PRO VICE-CHANCELLOR (EDUCATION AND STUDENT EXPERIENCE)**

The Board received a verbal update from Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education and Student Experience), Dr Charmagne Barnes, which updated on key Education and Student Experience activities. The Board noted the highlights.

According to feedback from Hertfordshire Students' Union (HSU), the new Induction Framework had seen positive student engagement in Semester A. Preparations were being made for Semester B and further work regarding re-induction and out-duction was planned.

Analyses of the National Student Survey (NSS) and Postgraduate Taught Experience Surveys (PTES) had been shared with Schools, and actions in relation to teaching quality, academic support and assessment had been identified at institutional level.

The Educational Gains Survey had been launched and response rates were improving. The Board acknowledged the importance of the survey on the Teaching Excellence Framework and noted the closure date had been extended to encourage a higher response rate of at least 35%.

The University would launch the NSS survey in January 2025 for a February 2025 start, and the PTES would open in March 2025. Hertfordshire Business School (HBS) and the School of Physics, Engineering and Mathematics (SPECS) would participate in a piloted new approach to the Student Voice Questionnaire, to encourage better response rates.

A review of the purpose and function of Programme Committees and School Academic Committees was underway to provide assurances in relation to their effectiveness and governance requirements.

The Centre for Learning and Student Success (CLASS) was undertaking a review of peer review and observation of teaching processes to give confidence in relation to the assurance and enhancement of teaching practices.

The Board was pleased to note that, according to SPMG data released the previous week, the University's undergraduate non-continuation was down to 19.2% from 22.8% with the biggest improvement in overseas undergraduate from 34.2% to 26.2%. The first sit pass rate across all Schools had increased, withdrawals were down, the number of students achieving a good degree had increased and average entry tariffs were 119. Positive progress was being made.

A new careers framework was being developed which articulated the careers, enterprise and entrepreneurship offer. The proposal would be brought to the Board for consultation in due course.

The HSU had raised concern over inconsistencies with the University's Artificial Intelligence guidance for students. The Board noted that concerns had been discussed with the President of the HSU and with the Educational Student Experience Committee and that the Assessment Expert Group were working with the HSU on improved AI advice.

The student-led insight team, 'Herts Unfiltered' had revealed that positively, the University's 3000 new students were pleased with their start at Hertfordshire and felt a sense of belonging.

The Board noted a concern that although feedback from student induction was positive, it was felt that further focus on increasing participation in some areas was required. The Board requested that concerns and suggestions in relation to student induction were taken to the Steering Group for the appropriate consideration and action.

RESOLVED:

The Board noted the update report on Education and Student Experience activities.

12 EDUCATION AND STUDENT EXPERIENCE STRAND OF THE NEW STRATEGIC PLAN

The Board received a presentation which updated on the development of the Student Engagement and Success Plan, which underpinned the Education and Student Success Strand of the new Strategic Plan 2025-2030. The Board acknowledged the presentation had been presented for feedback at the Educational Student Experience Committee earlier that week.

The Board observed that the development of frameworks for some areas, such as digital transformations, might get overlooked as they did not sit directly within a strand plan. The Board acknowledged the importance of continued consultation with stakeholders as plans and frameworks were being developed to ensure gaps were captured.

The Board suggested that terminology 'Access, Success and Progress' was preferable to 'Access, Success and Progression' and that Graduate Attributes should be simplified to 'Professional, Global, Sustainable, Digital and Inclusive'.

The Board noted that feedback from ESEC had been positive regarding content and presentation but had suggested the term 'Equity' was preferable to 'Equality' across the Strand and the entire Strategic Plan. Further, ESEC suggested that 'transition' within the plan required greater visibility in some areas of work.

The Board discussed a change from the title 'Education and Student Experience' to 'Education and Student Success' and agreed that a move to 'success' aligned with the pace and ambition of the Strategy. The Board acknowledged that an explanation to colleagues of the shift from 'experience' to 'success' would offer assurance that student experience had not been replaced, but was a vital component in the journey to student success.

RESOLVED

(Confidential Agenda Paper 12 refers)

13 BLACK, ASIAN AND MINORITY ETHNIC STUDENTS: ATTAINMENT GAP

The Board received a report which provided initial data on the awarding gap for 2023/24. The Board acknowledged the data presented from the AR03 dashboard was indicative and had not been confirmed by the Student Performance Monitoring Group (SPMG). The Board noted the key message was an improvement in the awarding gap with 68% of Black, Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) students achieving a first or 2:1 compared to 63% the previous year. However, despite the improvement, the gap remained and was above the University's KPI target. Data by school showed that across all Schools, besides Schools of Law and Education, the attainment gap had decreased since the previous year.

The Board noted that for the first time in Semester B, Schools had received module board reports at the end of exam boards, which were broken down by ethnicity to allow earlier, more impactful intervention on Continuous Enhancement Plans by Schools. The Board noted that ESEC would receive reports from Schools on CEP actions in response to this data.

An action from the previous meeting of Academic Board had requested a review of assessment types and examinations at level 4. The review found that of 638 modules at level 4, 5 had 100% examination and 63 had a combination of examination and course work. It was felt that where modules with examinations were high it was due to professional body requirements, however there was reassurance from Schools that exams at level 4 were not desired. The data would be examined in further detail however it highlighted a trend for higher failure rates at first sits with Hertfordshire International College (HIC) modules.

All Schools had attended workshops with the Educate Group looking at awarding gap data at University and National level. The Race and Ethnicity Equity Group would run programme level workshops which focussed on programmes with the biggest attainment gaps.

The Board discussed the University's approach to KPI setting in relation to the awarding gap and other institutional targets. It was acknowledged that the desired destination for the awarding gap was zero, but that progress towards target should be incremental. There was a suggestion that awarding gap KPI's might be aligned with the new Access and Participation Plan.

The Board acknowledged the delicate balance between aspirational and reasonable KPI targets, and how differently the University's performance might be perceived dependent upon the targets set. The Board noted that proposed KPI's would be taken to the governing body in November 2024.

(Confidential Agenda Paper 13 refers)

14 **ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION PLAN (APP)**

The Board received and noted the Access and Participation Plan (APP) which had been submitted following extensive institution-wide consultation. The Board noted the APP was on the Agenda for information and acknowledged its importance and synergy with the new University Strategic Plan.

(Confidential Agenda Paper 14 refers)

15 **REPORT FROM THE DEAN OF STUDENTS OFFICE**

The Board received a report from the Dean of Students, Geri Ward, which highlighted actions and activities undertaken by the Dean of Students Office.

In regard to safeguarding and student wellbeing, over 50 training sessions for staff were available and bookable on Herts Hub [Events \(sharepoint.com\)](#). Events continued to be well received by students and were bookable online [All events | Life | Uni of Herts](#). The Board noted new School based Wellbeing Intervention Posts were approved and at recruitment stage. In regard to Office for Students (OfS) condition E6 which would come into effect in August 2025, good progress continued to be made, and an update would be brought to the next meeting of the Board in March 2025.

The Board noted an update on the National Student Survey (NSS) of sexual misconduct which would be piloted on students in England that year as a follow-on survey to the NSS. Completion of the survey would be optional, and data would not form part of the NSS data set. Questions would be shared with the Board once finalised.

The Board received an update on Prevent activity and noted a Prevent Annual report would be taken to the Board of Governors in the coming weeks. The report would be brought to the next meeting of the Academic Board in March 2025.

The Board noted a summary of work undertaken by Student Procedures. UPR's for Student and Applicant Complaints (SA16), Student Discipline (SA13), and Support to Study (EQ11) policies had been reviewed with new training and guidance was available.

Cases of academic and non-academic misconduct remained low, in line with the downward trend over the past 8 years, and the number of formal complaints had reduced. Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) complaints had decreased by almost 50% on the previous year with no cases found to be justified.

The Board discussed the new Study Needs Agreement (SNA) system and noted that issues experienced at the beginning of the Academic Year had been resolved. It was noted that only module leaders and personal tutors should be allocated onto the system and that Schools were required to ensure that individuals were allocated to modules correctly. The Board acknowledged the new SNA system was a far more effective system which ensured that staff supporting students were receiving the information they required, and in greater detail. The system gave greater confidence and protection from a legal perspective.

ACTION:

Schools would ensure and confirm that individuals were correctly allocated on the SNA system.

RESOLVED:

The Board noted the report from the Dean of Students.

(Confidential Agenda Paper 15 refers)

16 RECRUITMENT

The Board received a written report submitted by the Director of Marketing and Communications, Karen Chater, which outlined key messages from the undergraduate recruitment cycle 2024/25. The Chair provided a verbal update.

The Board noted at the end of the recruitment cycle, the sector was up 1%, high tariff institutions were up 9%, low tariff were down 4.1% and mid-tariff were broadly stable. The University's performance had been initially positive, but had been impacted by Clearing market conditions, particularly the increase in recruitment by the higher tariff institutions.

Delays within the Visa Agency had impacted international student arrivals in Semester A which had consequently impacted international student numbers. It was hoped that international students affected by visa agency delays would arrive for a Semester B start.

RESOLVED:

The Board noted the report.

(Confidential Agenda Paper 16 refers)

17 ACADEMIC YEAR CALENDAR 2025-2026

The Board received the Academic Year Calendar 2025/2026 for formal approval. The Board acknowledged the calendar allowed a full 2-week period between the publication of results and the beginning of the refer/defer assessment period, which had been systemised going forward.

RESOLVED:

The Board approved the Academic Year Calendar 2025/26.

(Agenda Paper 17 refers)

18 ANNUAL REPORT TO THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS

The Board received the Annual Report of the Academic Board to the Board of Governors.

RESOLVED:

The Board noted the report.

(Confidential Agenda Paper 18 refers)

19 REVIEW OF ONGOING CONDITION B3 STUDENT OUTCOMES DATA

The Board received a report from Director of Academic Quality, Professor Frank Haddleton which provided an initial analysis of the University's performance against OfS condition B3 thresholds following the publication of 2022/23 data in July 2024. The Board noted Condition B3 monitored student satisfaction and enabled the OfS to identify and review universities with poor outcomes data. The University had reviewed the data, which was set out and RAG rated in the report, in terms of Student Continuation, Student Completion and Student Progression.

(Confidential Agenda Paper 19 refers)

20 **REPORT TEMPLATE**

The Board noted a new standard report template to be used for all reports to Committees of the Board of Governors and Academic Board.

[Standard-Report-Template-2024.docx](#)

21 **CLERK'S REPORT**

The Board noted information contained within the Clerks Report.

(Confidential Agenda Paper21 refers)

22 **EMERGENCY BUSINESS**

There were no matters of emergency business.