

Minutes:	Board of Governors
Time and date:	10:00, Thursday 11 May 2023
Location:	Edith Murphy House, rooms 3.10-3.12
Present:	Ian Squires (Chair), Catherine Clarke (to item 128), Peter Collyer, Stuart Dawkins, Phil Grierson, Jonathan Kerry, Jonathan Mills, Katie Normington, Buddy Penfold, Sardip Sandhu, Aashni Sawjani, Beverley Shears, Benjamin Smith, Dan Toner, and Paul Woodgates
In attendance:	Simon Bradbury (Pro Vice-Chancellor International) (item 118), Sarah Bradley (CEO, De Montfort Students' Union) (item 126), James Evans (Deputy Director of Strategic Planning) (item 121), Mel Fowler (Executive Director of Marketing and Communications) (item 122), Richard Greene (Deputy Vice-Chancellor), Chloe Keenan (Governance Officer), Debbie Muddimer (Director of Finance and Procurement), Simon Oldroyd (Pro Vice-Chancellor Sustainability) (item 120), Nikki Pierce (Registrar (Academic) and Secretary to the Board), Harpreet Sandhu (Head of Legal Services) (item 118)
Secretary:	Nick Jeffs; nick.jeffs@dmu.ac.uk

CONFIRMED

111 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Fiona Cownie and Peter Tansley. Apologies for an early departure had been received from Catherine Clarke.

112 Declarations of any pecuniary, family or other personal interests

Looking ahead to item 126, it was noted that Aashni Sawjani, Beverley Shears, and Benjamin Smith were all current members of De Montfort Students' Union's Trustee Board.

No further declarations of pecuniary, family or other personal interests were made in respect of any items on the agenda.

The university maintains a Register of Interests, which records standing declarations of pecuniary, family or other personal interests from all members of the Board of Governors and the University Leadership Board.

113 Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the 2 February 2023 meeting of the Board of Governors be approved.

114 Matters arising

All of the matters arising [114] had been completed prior to the meeting or were scheduled for consideration at a future meeting of the board.

115 Report from the Chair

The Chair of the Board delivered an update concerning a range of issues:

- i. The university had retained the services of executive search firm Odgers Berndtson to support the recruitment of new independent governors, which would take place over the summer. In particular the university was looking for candidates with: experience of digital transformation; international experience in a higher education context; and senior academic experience in the UK higher education sector. It was hoped that the recruitment process would be complete in time for the new governors to join the board for its first meeting of the 2023/24 academic year.
- ii. Consideration would be given in the coming months to an appropriate focus for the board's strategic away day, which would take place in the autumn. One potential focus would be discussion of the 'future size and shape' of the university.
- iii. The Chair thanked those governors who had been able to take part in the 'Our University Day' event, which had been held on 8 March 2023.
- iv. Governors were reminded of their invite to visit the university's Careers Hub following the meeting, which would include a demonstration of the 'Bodyswaps' virtual reality training platform.

RESOLVED:

That the update be noted.

116 Report from the Vice-Chancellor

The Vice-Chancellor introduced a report [116] concerning a range of recent developments in relation to the university and the higher education sector as a whole. Arising from the discussion of this item, and questions from governors, the following points were highlighted:

- i. The university did not expect to receive a response from the Office for Students concerning the resubmitted data for condition of registration B3 until later in May.
- ii. **[Redacted]**
- iii. Governors welcomed the improved metrics arising from the 2023 Staff Pulse Survey, which included an increase of 19% in the number of staff completing the survey, and an increase of 7% in the net promoter score ('DMU is a good place to work').
- iv. It was noted that there was little evidence so far that the University and College Union's marking and assessment boycott was having a significant impact at DMU. The university continued to implement ways in which any potential negative impact might be mitigated, including the development of emergency regulations that would allow for progression and award decisions on the basis of an incomplete set of results. Any such regulations would be considered and approved by the Academic Board before being implemented.
- v. In discussing the changes to staffing outlined in the report, it was noted that the majority of the significant, planned organisational changes would have been completed by the beginning of 2024, although it was recognised that incoming

senior staff may wish to make smaller-scale changes within their own areas of operations.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

117 Report from the student governors

The student governors delivered an update concerning a range of issues:

- i. The students' union had held a successful set of elections to leadership positions for 2023/24, with over 20,000 votes having been placed across all of the candidates.
- ii. Planning had begun for the next Freshers' Fair as well as the role the union would play in the university's wider welcome weekend.
- iii. The student council would shortly be considering proposals aimed at streamlining the union's governance structures.
- iv. The reception area within the Campus Centre, known as the Student Hub, would continue into 2023/24 as it had proved to be popular with the student body.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

118 [Redacted]

119 [Redacted]

120 Implementation plan update: Sustainability and the SDGs

The Pro Vice-Chancellor Sustainability introduced a report [120] concerning the progress made by the university in meeting the targets associated with the 'success indicators' of the Sustainability and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) implementation plan. Arising from the discussion of this item, and questions from governors, the following points were highlighted:

- i. It was suggested that staff and students were conscious of the ongoing work in support of this implementation plan, but it was recognised that continuing to raise awareness across the institution would remain critical to its success.
- ii. It was noted that the university's relationship with the UN was strong, and it was felt that DMU was ahead of other institutions in embedding the SDGs in its curriculum.

RESOLVED:

That the progress outlined in the report be noted.

121 Strategic KPTs update

The Deputy Director of Strategic Planning introduced a report [121] concerning an update on DMU's performance against the key performance targets of the Empowering University strategy. Arising from the discussion of this item, and questions from governors, the following points were highlighted:

- i. Governors welcomed the progress outlined in the report, and agreed that the scorecard included at Appendix A was a useful summary of the university's performance 'at a glance'.
- ii. It was recognised that it would be critical for the university to address the increase in student non-continuation. Retention had been the subject of a recent internal audit review, which had identified points in the academic year when students were more likely to leave the university. DMU would use the outcomes of this review, alongside its own faculty-level data, to explore what might be done to address where possible the reasons why some students were choosing to leave before completing their studies.
- iii. It was suggested that it was possible that there was a link between an increase in the number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds studying at DMU and a decrease in retention. Although it was felt that DMU's performance in this area was generally better than others across the sector, the university would continue to examine its data, in the context of the Access and Participation Plan, with a view to identifying areas that might require more support.
- iv. It was noted that the People and Culture Committee would continue to have oversight of the university's reporting of its gender and race pay gaps, and that a working group had been established to explore ways in which the gender pay gap might be further improved.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

122 Recruitment update

The Executive Director of Marketing and Communications introduced a report [122] concerning the university's performance in terms of student recruitment. Arising from the discussion of this item, and questions from governors, the following points were highlighted:

- i. It was recognised that the university would be looking for a strong performance in Clearing this year. With entry grades returning to pre-pandemic levels, it was hoped that the number of applicants entering Clearing would also return to pre-pandemic levels, thus allowing greater opportunity for DMU.
- ii. **[Redacted]**
- iii. It was noted that the university had taken the strategic decision to increase its tariff in some areas, but it was agreed that it would be important to remain flexible, particularly in Clearing.
- iv. **[Redacted]**
- v. It was recognised that NHS programmes remained a competitive area, that was experiencing a reduction in demand to that seen prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, some programmes operated a cap in terms of the number of students and so it was hoped that these would still be full to capacity despite the decrease in demand.

RESOLVED:

That the performance outlined in the report be noted.

123 Research White Paper

The Vice-Chancellor introduced a report [123] concerning a White Paper entitled 'Proposals for Research Structures', which had outlined a potential new approach to the academic research structure at DMU, driven by a clear set of objectives aligned to the Empowering University strategy. Arising from the discussion of this item, and questions from governors, the following points were highlighted:

- i. It was recognised that this the introduction of the proposed new academic research structure would present an opportunity for a step change at DMU, with a shift in focus to improving the quality of research rather than increasing the quantity. Research institutes would be aligned to specific themes, for which it was hoped that the university would build a national and international reputation.
- ii. It was noted that the different levels of members within an institute would allow for the easy identification of colleagues with 'significant responsibility for research' (for Research Excellence Framework purposes), as well as providing an opportunity for the development of early career researchers and postgraduate research students.
- iii. Governors welcomed the proposed new approach to academic research structures, and commended the extent to which staff had been engaged in the development of those proposals.

RESOLVED:

That the research structures outlined in the report, and the proposed 'next steps', be endorsed

124 Student data quality update

The Registrar (Academic) and Secretary to the Board introduced a report [124] concerning the work that was being carried out at DMU to improve the quality of the university's student data. Arising from the discussion of this item, and questions from governors, the following points were highlighted:

- i. The university would be discussing with its internal auditors the timing of the next review of data quality. It was suggested that it would be more useful to conduct such a review once the planned improvements to data quality had been completed, rather than assessing the current position.
- ii. It was noted that, in addition to the internal audit, there would be other opportunities for independent verification that the improvements the university had made had been successful, including the return of data to the Higher Education Statistics Agency in the autumn.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

125 Financial position update

The Director of Finance and Procurement delivered a presentation concerning the university's financial position at the end of April 2023 (Period 8). Arising from the discussion of this item, and questions from governors, the following points were highlighted:

- i. Governors welcomed the broadly positive position outlined in the presentation, noting that it demonstrated an acceleration of the university's financial recovery when compared with the forecast. **[Redacted]**
- ii. It was recognised that the savings achieved via vacancy freezes had required teams across the institution to work with less resource than might be ideal. It was noted that savings achieved via these freezes would not be made again in future years should those vacancies be filled.
- iii. It was noted that the university's level of staff turnover had increased, and it was suggested that this was likely to be the result of delays in people moving on due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as a natural consequence of large-scale institutional change. However, it was felt that such turnover could be considered healthy in order to avoid stagnation, and it was noted that the university's level of turnover still fell below the sector average.
- iv. It was noted that the underspend in the capital budget represented projects being pushed back into future years rather than being abandoned entirely.
- v. Governors recognised that the final outturn position might appear less positive than the current position suggested owing to costs that would be incurred in the final quarter of the academic year.
- vi. It was noted that, given the disparity between the forecast and actual positions, financial forecasting would be the subject of a future review by the university's internal auditors.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation be noted.

126 De Montfort Students' Union Articles of Association

The CEO of De Montfort Students' Union introduced a report [126] concerning proposed changes to the union's Articles of Association.

RESOLVED:

That the proposed changes be approved.

127 OfS statement of expectations: harassment and sexual misconduct

The Registrar (Academic) and Secretary to the Board introduced a report [127] concerning the university's progress towards meeting the OfS' statement of expectations with regards preventing and addressing harassment and sexual misconduct affecting students in higher education.

It was noted that the People and Culture Committee had considered this issue at its meeting on 24 April 2023, and had discussed the university's new Staff-to-Student Relationships Policy, which set out formally expectations around behaviours and professional boundaries between staff and students.

RESOLVED:

That the progress outlined in the report be noted.

128 Apprenticeships quality update

The Registrar (Academic) and Secretary to the Board introduced a report [128] concerning the quality assurance of the university's apprenticeships provision. Arising from the discussion of this item, and questions from governors, the following points were highlighted:

- i. The university would be applying the 'lessons learnt' from the External Quality Assessment of the End Point Assessment (EPA) of the Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship to its other integrated apprenticeship programmes to ensure that any potential issues with their EPAs would be also be addressed.
- ii. Future reporting on this issue would take the form of regular feedback at board meetings from the lead governors for Ofsted and skills, as well as more formal reporting to both the board and its committees (for example, consideration of the Self-assessment Report and Quality Improvement Plan by the board, and the apprenticeships performance dashboard by the Finance and Performance Committee).
- iii. The university would continue seeking to identify suitable Ofsted-related training for governors.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

Catherine Clarke left the meeting at this point

129 Member's updates

i. Audit Committee

The unconfirmed minutes of the committee's meeting of 13 March 2023 were included at item 130. In addition, the Chair of the committee highlighted a robust discussion that members had held regarding artificial intelligence and its implications for both cyber security and academia.

ii. Finance and Performance Committee

The unconfirmed minutes of the committee's meeting of 2 March 2023 were included at item 131. In addition, the Chair of the committee highlighted a discussion that members had held regarding the potential introduction of a framework that would help to inform the university's decisions around the ethical implications of proposed fundraising opportunities.

iii. People and Culture Committee

The minutes of the committee's meeting of 13 February 2023 were included at item 132. In addition, the Chair of the committee highlighted discussions from that meeting, and the more recent meeting of 24 April 2023, that had focussed on the progress to date of the student experience project, and rates of completion of mandatory training amongst staff.

iv. Academic Board

The minutes of the 1 March 2023 meeting of Academic Board (AB) were included at item 133. In addition, the Academic Staff Governor highlighted the following:

- The reports that were being submitted to AB were now seeing a real sense of alignment with the Empowering University strategy.
- AB had held a robust and positive discussion around the 'Proposals for Research Structures' White Paper, as well as discussions around marketing and recruitment, and academic quality assurance.
- AB had also discussed artificial intelligence, including the ways in which the library would be working to mitigate the potential impact of chatbots such as ChatGPT on academic integrity.

RESOLVED:

That the updates be noted.

130 Unconfirmed minutes of the 13 March 2023 meeting of the Audit Committee

RESOLVED:

That the unconfirmed minutes [130] be noted.

131 Unconfirmed minutes of the 2 March 2023 meeting of the Finance and Performance Committee

RESOLVED:

That the unconfirmed minutes [131] be noted.

132 Minutes of the 13 February 2023 meeting of the People and Culture Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes [132] be noted.

133 Minutes of the 1 March 2023 meeting of the Academic Board

RESOLVED:

That the minutes [133] be noted.

134 Conclusion of Prevent monitoring

RESOLVED:

That the report [134] be noted.

135 Items placed under the university seal since the previous meeting

RESOLVED:

That the report [135] be noted.

136 Review of the board's performance

Members were content that the board had been effective in discharging its responsibilities, and that all present had been enabled to be effective in their contribution.

137 Date of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Board of Governors would take place at 10:00 on 6 July 2023 in Bede House, room 0.46.

138 Any other business

Aashni Sawjani and Benjamin Smith

The Chair thanked on behalf of the board Aashni Sawjani and Benjamin Smith for their service as student governors, Aashni since July 2021, and Benjamin since October 2022. Aashni was also thanked for her service as a member of the Nominations Committee during both years of her time on the board. The tenures of both student governors would end on 30 June 2023. It was hoped that two new student governors would be appointed to the board early in July 2023.

Meeting duration: 10:00-14:19