

Minutes:	Board of Governors
Time and date:	10:00, Thursday 15 May 2025
Location:	The Yard, rooms 3.05 and 3.06
Present:	Ian Squires (Chair), Alison Court, Shreena Dasani, Stuart Dawkins, Vivek Ganotra (except item 122), Phil Grierson, Jonathan Mills, Patrick Moody (except item 122), Abdul Mullick, Katie Normington, Judith Olurankinse, Buddy Penfold, Sardip Sandhu, Beverley Shears (from item 118), Shikha Singh, and Paul Woodgates
In attendance:	Tash Bell, Head of Marketing (item 119), Alison Benson, Deputy Secretary and Head of Compliance, Mel Fowler, Executive Director of Marketing and Communications (items 118 and 119), John Hurst, Director of Strategic Planning and Insight (item 123), Tracey Jessup, Chief Transformation and Resources Officer (items 118 and 119), Chloe Keenan, Governance Officer, Rob Kitt, Associate Director of Portfolio and Market Insight (item 122), Debbie Muddimer, Executive Director of Finance and Procurement (to item 117), Susan Orr, Deputy Vice-Chancellor Education and Equalities (item 122), Nikki Pierce, Registrar (Academic) and Secretary to the Board of Governors
Secretary:	Nick Jeffs; nick.jeffs@dmu.ac.uk

CONFIRMED

109 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Tamera Campbell, Priya Karasala, Jonathan Kerry and Peter Tansley. Apologies for a late arrival had been received from Beverley Shears and apologies for an early departure had been received from Debbie Muddimer.

110 Declarations of any pecuniary, family or other personal interests

No 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.

111 Minutes of previous meeting

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the 27 February 2025 [111] meeting of the Board of Governors be approved.

112 Matters arising

The matters arising [112] had either been completed or were scheduled for consideration at a future meeting of the board.

113 Report from the Chair

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

- i. The recent governor recruitment exercise had drawn to a close with the interview panel recommending the appointment of Catherine Njoroge as an independent governor and member of the Audit and Risk Committee. Catherine's appointment could be considered by the Nominations Committee at its meeting on 5 June and the board thereafter by email. It was noted that the exercise had identified two further potential candidates for future independent governor vacancies.
- ii. The 2024/25 review of governance at DMU, conducted by Halpin, had concluded. Halpin's final report would be considered later on the agenda at item 125.
- iii. The OfS had met with university chairs to discuss the future of higher education governance. It was noted that the OfS would publish a report on that topic later in the year.
- iv. On 31 March, the Chair had attended the launch event for the university's Research and Innovation Institutes.
- v. Governors were encouraged to join a virtual 'learning walk' focussing on the university's apprenticeships provision. The virtual learning walk would take place on 28 May.
- vi. The annual governor appraisal process would begin shortly. Governors would be contacted by the Governance Office to identify when their appraisal would take place.
- vii. The university's Deputy Vice-Chancellor Education and Equalities, Susan Orr, who would be retiring at the end of May, would be joining the board for its lunch.

RESOLVED:

That the update be noted.

114 Report from the Vice-Chancellor

The Vice-Chancellor introduced a report [114] 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 government's immigration white paper has been published on 12 May. The white paper had included a number of proposals relevant to universities, including the tightening of UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) Basic Compliance Assessment metrics, the shortening of the duration of the graduate visa, and the introduction of an international student levy.
- ii. The UKVI visit to DMU, which had taken place across 13-14 May, had been positive. UKVI's full report of the visit would be shared with the university in due course.
- iii. The university would begin the process of refreshing its strategy in the autumn. It was intended that the board be involved in that process, which would include an assessment of the performance of the existing strategy, and that a fuller discussion would take place at its away day in October.

- iv. The name of the university's new faculty, which had been created by the merger of the faculties of Arts, Design and Humanities, and Computing, Engineering and Media, would be the Faculty of Technology, Arts, and Culture. The new faculty would come into existence from 1 September 2025.
- v. It was noted that the university had sought legal advice around adherence to the ruling of the UK Supreme Court on the definition of sex under the Equality Act 2010. The university, in partnership with the students' union, would continue to support staff and students who had been affected by the ruling, and the Vice-Chancellor had met with staff networks to discuss with them their concerns.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

115 Report from the Student Governors

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

- i. Members of De Montfort Students' Union had attended the National Union of Students' annual conference.
- ii. The Student Leadership Elections had taken place earlier in the spring and the elected candidates would shortly be undergoing their induction.
- iii. DMU had been successful in a number of games held as part of the annual varsity competition with the University of Leicester.
- iv. The union had supported students who had been observing Ramadan as well as those affected by the recent conflict between India and Pakistan.
- v. It was noted that this would be the final meeting for the current student governors Priya Karasala and Judith Olurankinse, whose terms of office would end on 30 June. The board thanked Priya and Judith for their service and for their contributions to the business of the board during their tenures. It was intended that their successors be in post from 1 July in order to ensure continuous student representation on the board.

RESOLVED:

That the update be noted.

116 [Redacted]

117 [Redacted]

Beverley Shears joined the meeting at this point; Debbie Muddimer left the meeting at this point

118 Recruitment and admissions update

The Executive Director of Marketing and Communications introduced a report [118] concerning the university's current position in terms of student recruitment and admissions. Arising from the discussion of this item, and questions from governors, the following points were highlighted:

- i. It was recognised that the domestic recruitment position continued to be challenging but that the January and April intakes had seen welcome improvements to the overseas recruitment position.

- ii. It was suggested that the university might begin to see a gradual movement of applicants away from the autumn overseas intake as the January and April intakes grew. It was recognised that it was too early to tell if this would be a short-term change or a longer-term rebalancing of the overseas recruitment market.
- iii. It was noted that the university's conversion rate continued to improve and that it would likely be in a better position going in to Clearing than first forecast.
- iv. In discussing what potential applicants appeared to be doing instead of going to university, it was noted that the largest growth had been observed in those persons not in education or training. The board welcomed the university's exploration of ways in which it might be able to increase its appeal to this group, including via shorter qualifications and a focus on local skills needs.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

119 Marketing update

The Executive Director of Marketing and Communications, and the Head of Marketing, delivered a presentation concerning the university's approach to the marketing of its programmes of study. Arising from the discussion of this item, and questions from governors, the following points were highlighted:

- i. The board welcomed the presentation and the clarity it provided around the university's current approach to marketing.
- ii. It was noted that the university had recently engaged the services of a new media agency who would be helping to ensure that DMU's messaging would be landing with its target market.
- iii. In discussing the 'DMU Distinctions', it was recognised that they would allow the university to map differentiators between institutions and outline more clearly why DMU might be a better fit for an applicant than an alternative provider. It was agreed that it would be important to ensure that the things DMU did well – the DMU Distinctions – continued to be done well so that they would continue to set the university apart from its competitors.
- iv. It was also recognised that improving the university's reputation in certain areas, particularly academic reputation and league table position, would be critical but that it would also take time. However, it was agreed that there would be opportunities in the meantime to improve the metrics that fed into those league tables, and to highlight DMU's successes in other areas.
- v. It was noted that the university was carrying out some work around its brand story as well as the way in which it communicated its strategic narrative. The outcome of both pieces of work would be shared with the board in due course.
- vi. It was recognised that it would be important to make potential applicants aware of DMU at an early stage with a view to starting a dialogue with them about the course they might want to study when it was appropriate to do so.
- vii. It was noted that a social media strategist had recently joined the marketing team and would be making sure that DMU was taking advantage of the opportunities offered across a range of social media platforms.
- viii. It was noted that a further update on student recruitment would be shared with the board in July, and that the outcome of some of the aforementioned work on brand would be shared with the board in the autumn.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation be noted.

120 **[Redacted]**

121 **UKVI compliance update**

The Registrar (Academic) and Secretary to the Board concerning the university's position in respect of UKVI compliance. Arising from the discussion of this item, and questions from governors, the following points were highlighted:

- i. The board welcomed the news that the UKVI visit had been positive and commended the team involved for their management of the process. It was noted that UKVI's report of the visit would follow in due course.
- ii. **[Redacted]**
- iii. **[Redacted]**
- iv. The board welcomed the fact that the university had begun to model the potential implications for DMU of the changes to government policy proposed in the recent immigration white paper.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

Vivek Ganotra and Patrick Moody left the meeting at this point

122 **Student Experience Tracker 2024/25**

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor Education and Equalities, and the Associate Director of Portfolio and Market Insight, introduced a report [122], and delivered a presentation, concerning key findings from the 2024/25 Student Experience Tracker. Arising from the discussion of this item, and questions from governors, the following points were highlighted:

- i. The board welcomed the improvements that had been seen in the tracker's data since the previous year.
- ii. It was suggested that block teaching was likely to have played a significant role in the improvements that had been seen in the results for Level 6 students. It was noted that this would be the first cohort that had studied by block teaching, and it was hoped that the improvements visible in the tracker would also be reflected in the results of the National Student Survey, which would be available in the summer.
- iii. In discussing the success of block teaching, it was noted that the approach had allowed the university to design a curriculum that better fit with the various demands on students' time compared to the more traditional approach. It was also noted that some of DMU's competitors had begun to explore block teaching on a smaller scale, and it was recognised that it would be important for DMU to work hard to maintain its sector-leading position in this area.
- iv. In discussing the results for postgraduate taught and research students, it was noted that the Vice-Chancellor had directed DMU's Education Academy to explore why research students were more satisfied overall than taught students, and what might then be done to improve the experience of taught students.
- v. It was noted that response rates to surveys such as the tracker begun to fall and that the university would need to continue to work hard to encourage students to engage with the exercise in future years.

RESOLVED:

- a. That the report be noted.
- b. That the presentation slides be shared with the board following the meeting.

Vivek Ganotra and Patrick Moody returned to the meeting at this point

123 League tables strategy update

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor Planning, Research and Innovation, and the Director of Strategic Planning and Insight, introduced a report [123] concerning an update on DMU's performance in key domestic and international league tables, as well as an outline of the strategic work being undertaken by the League Table Group to support future improvement. Arising from the discussion of this item, and questions from governors, the following points were highlighted:

- i. The board welcomed the fact that the university, via the League Table Group, would continue to consider how and where it might make sustainable improvements to its performance.
- ii. It was hoped that improvements in DMU's National Student Survey results, alongside other positive developments to the student experience, would lead to a stronger performance in league tables published from September 2025 onwards. It was noted that league tables published before that date would likely use older data and therefore may not reflect a notable improvement in DMU's performance.
- iii. It was agreed that it would be important to get to the point where league tables were no longer a factor in why applicants chose not to come to DMU.
- iv. It was recognised that the university tended to perform better in league tables that were weighted more heavily towards student opinion, such as Uni Compare and Whatuni, where DMU had placed 25th and 27th, respectively, in 2024.

RESOLVED:

That the current performance of DMU across league table publications, and the strategic direction and activities of the League Table Group, as outlined in the report, be noted.

124 Member's updates

i. Audit and Risk Committee

In the absence of the Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee, no update was provided. However, it was noted that the unconfirmed minutes of the most recent meeting, that of 14 April 2025, had been included for noting at item 127.

ii. Finance and Performance Committee

The Chair of the Finance and Performance Committee noted that a number of items from its most recent meeting had already been considered by the board earlier in the agenda. In addition, it was noted that the committee had considered a report on fundraising and gifts during 2023/24, and had received a presentation from JP Morgan concerning the performance of the university's investment portfolio.

iii. People and Culture Committee

It was noted that the unconfirmed minutes of the committee's most recent meeting, that of 2 April 2025, had been included for noting at item 130. In addition, the Chair of the People and Culture Committee noted that the committee had discussed items relating to: the management of institutional change; the development of an employee voice strategy; the induction and training of managers; and the university's race and gender pay gaps, as well as the development of reporting around the disability pay gap.

iv. Lead governors for Ofsted and skills

The lead governors for Ofsted and skills noted the following, which had taken place since the last meeting of the board:

- Lead governors had attended the launch of a new primary school teaching apprenticeship.
- The university had successfully tendered to deliver the Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship for another two years.

In addition, and as noted by the Chair at item 113, governors were encouraged to join the virtual 'learning walk' taking place on 28 May.

v. Academic Board

The minutes of the 5 March 2025 meeting of the Academic Board (AB) had been included for noting at item 133. In addition, the academic staff governor and AB link governor noted that AB had discussed: a pilot for the Future Pedagogies programme; a policy relating to student attendance and engagement; the development of a policy around consultancy; and the development of a 'shadow' Academic Board.

RESOLVED:

That the updates be noted.

125 Governance Effectiveness Review 2024/25

The Registrar (Academic) and Secretary to the Board introduced a report [125] concerning the outcome of an external review of the effectiveness of governance at DMU, which has been conducted by Halpin. Arising from the discussion of this item, and questions from governors, the following points were highlighted:

- i. The board welcomed the report, noting in particular the overall outcome of DMU's governance being rated as 'good to leading edge'. The board also welcomed various recommendations as to how the university's governance might be further developed and commended the proposed approach to developing an action plan to help guide the implementation of those recommendations where appropriate.
- ii. It was recognised that the overall outcome was a significant achievement for DMU given the position in 2019 when the university had been subject to enhanced monitoring by the Office for Students as a result of issues that had been identified in relation to governance.

- iii. It was agreed that consideration would be given to how best to publicise the outcome of the review in an appropriate fashion, and whether there might be an opportunity to market DMU's good governance as one of its USPs.

RESOLVED:

- a. That the summary of the review process and outcome, as outlined in the report, be noted.
- b. That the final report of Halpin's review of the effectiveness of governance at DMU, as appended to the report, be noted.
- c. That the draft action plan be noted.
- d. That the final version of the proposed action plan be considered by the board at its meeting on 10 July 2025.

126 Minutes of the 10 February 2025 meeting of the Audit and Risk Committee

RESOLVED:

- a. That the minutes [126] be noted.
- b. That the role of governors in the event of a cyber security related emergency be explored as part of a future governor drop-in session.

127 Unconfirmed minutes of the 14 April 2025 meeting of the Audit and Risk Committee

RESOLVED:

That the unconfirmed minutes [127] be noted.

128 Minutes of the 4 February 2025 meeting of the Finance and Performance Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes [128] be noted.

129 Minutes of the 13 February 2025 meeting of the Finance and Performance Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes [129] be noted.

130 Unconfirmed minutes of the 2 April 2025 meeting of the People and Culture Committee

RESOLVED:

That the unconfirmed minutes [130] be noted.

131 Harassment and Sexual Misconduct: Implementation of Office for Students Condition of Registration E6

RESOLVED:

That the report [131] be noted.

132 Constitution of the Academic Board (revised)

RESOLVED:

That the revisions to the constitution be noted.

133 Minutes of the 5 March 2025 meeting of the Academic Board

RESOLVED:

That the minutes [133] be noted.

134 Conclusion of Prevent monitoring for 2023/24

RESOLVED:

That the report [134] be noted.

135 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.

136 Date of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Board of Governors would take place at 10:00 on Thursday 10 July 2025 in The Yard, rooms 3.05 and 3.06.

137 Any other business

No items were raised.

Meeting duration: 10:00-14:49