

Minutes:	Board of Governors strategic away day
Time and date:	10:00, Thursday 16 October 2025
Location:	The Yard, room 3.02 and 3.05
Present:	Ian Squires (Chair), Tamera Campbell, Alison Court, Stuart Dawkins, Vivek Ganatra, Phil Grierson, Dilpreet Kaur, Jonathan Mills, Patrick Moody (to item 7), Catherine Njoroge, Katie Normington, Shikha Singh (to item 8), Peter Tansley, and Paul Woodgates
In attendance:	Diana Beech, Director of the Finsbury Institute, City St George's, University of London (item 7), Simon Bradbury, Pro Vice-Chancellor International, Shreena Dasani, Governor Apprentice, Bridget Donoghue, Executive Director of People Services, John Hurst, Director of Strategic Planning and Insight, Tracey Jessup, Chief Transformation and Resources Officer, Mike Kagioglou, Deputy Vice-Chancellor Planning, Research and Innovation, Sophia Imagi, Governance Officer, Debbie Muddimer, Executive Director of Finance and Procurement, Simon Oldroyd, Pro Vice-Chancellor Sustainability and Dean of Health and Life Sciences, Nikki Pierce, Registrar (Academic) and Secretary to the Board of Governors, Lisa Stansbie, Deputy Vice-Chancellor Education, Equalities and Student Experience Vivienne Stern, Chief Executive, Universities UK (item 3), David Warden, Head of the Vice-Chancellor's Office and Senior Policy Adviser
Secretary:	Nick Jeffs; nick.jeffs@dmu.ac.uk

CONFIRMED

1 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence had been received from governors Jonathan Kerry, Abdul Mullick, Sardip Sandhu, Beverley Shears, and Twig Smalley, and members of the executive Jill Cowley, Mel Fowler, Shushma Patel, and Kasim Sheikh. Apologies for an early departure had been received from governors Patrick Moody and Shikha Singh.

2 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.

3 ‘Navigating current challenges and looking ahead to the future of UK higher education’

The Chief Executive of Universities UK, Vivienne Stern, delivered a presentation concerning the challenging climate facing the higher education (HE) sector, including the consequences of government policies and the increasingly competitive HE market, which together had placed significant financial pressures on universities across the UK. Arising from the discussion of this item, and questions from governors, the following points were highlighted:

- i. It was suggested that there were opportunities available and that these should be incorporated into strategic thinking. Members noted that the university has always taken a different approach in offering HNCs/HNDs and could continue to diversify away from standard degree provision.
- ii. It was noted that the university could look to examples of specialist institutions that focus on purpose, consider barriers to change, and the university's ability to seize opportunities, including addressing the risk-averse nature of the HE sector.
- iii. Attendees questioned the viability of the government's announced funding for Level 4 expansion and suggested considering plans in case opportunities arose in the future.
- iv. It was noted that there is a risk of Leicestershire being left behind due to not being part of a mayoral or strategic authority, highlighting the need to raise awareness of this within government.
- v. Attendees explored options such as collaborating with other universities, working with organisations on apprenticeships, and managing university resources by offering degrees or programmes that met demand from learners.
- vi. Attendees considered whether the university should aim for a strategy focused on survival or one that assumes continued resilience. It was noted that universities are generally resilient and it was agreed that the focus of the refreshed strategy should be on sustainability, and that it should incorporate long-term, future-oriented thinking.
- vii. Attendees emphasised the importance of maintaining high standards, having strong controls in place, and exploring risks while avoiding those opportunities unlikely to succeed. It was recognised that there is no single solution and that the university would need to adopt various approaches.

RESOLVED:

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

4 Refreshing the Empowering University strategy: mission, vision, values

The Vice-Chancellor delivered a presentation that reminder the board and leadership team of the ten objectives set at the last away day in October 2024 across technology, research, and innovation, highlighting the progress made and the resulting impact. The Vice-Chancellor also outlined that the strategy refresh would take place in three stages and encouraged members to be bold, imaginative and questioning.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation be noted.

5 Evaluation of the Empowering University strategy

The Director of Strategic Planning delivered a presentation on the 21 KPTs across the five-year cycle, highlighting those that had been met, partially met, and not met. **[Redacted]** Arising from the discussion of this item, and questions from governors, the following points were highlighted:

- i. Members discussed the factors that shape how KPTs are set and the parameters used to measure them.
- ii. Members asked what lessons could be carried forward as the process is repeated. It was observed that measures should be put in place earlier to allow for more complete data, and that the university could set more ambitious targets in some areas.
- iii. It was highlighted that the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings relate specifically to performance against the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and were different from the standard Times Higher Education university league tables.
- iv. It was agreed that the university should not simply return to its previous KPTs, but reconsider them with a fresh perspective, while recognising that some may still be appropriate.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation be noted.

6 Breakout Session: Refreshing pillars and embedding themes

The Vice-Chancellor introduced a breakout session titled 'Refreshing pillars and embedding themes'. Members identified six themes after deliberations and discussions in small groups. The six themes identified were:

- i. **Transformation** for students, the city, and the institution. Members identified key pillars for this theme including tangible transformation in student lives, fostering staff pride in changes, and contributing to the city's economic growth by training a workforce with the skills needed by Leicester.
- ii. **Education and Skills:** it was suggested that the education provided by the university should be leading-edge and personalised. It was highlighted that this theme would build on previous block teaching efforts to achieve the next level of personalisation in terms of location and context. This included partnerships with companies, a focus on future-oriented skills and entrepreneurship, and providing a global education across multiple campuses and countries.
- iii. **Partnerships:** it was noted that this theme involved a shared purpose through partnerships with businesses, local organisations, and international institutions. Members suggested that partnerships should bring capabilities that the university did not currently possess. The university should also clearly define what constitutes a partnership and its intended outcomes. Further, the university might consider setting a percentage of a course/programme that would have local partnerships.
- iv. **Inclusivity:** it was suggested that this theme could focus on outcomes for students after graduation relating to community impact and measuring the effectiveness of lifelong learning. It was also noted that the inclusivity theme would address awarding gaps and consider how best to measure them. Additionally, the

theme would focus on the university's influence on other communities, including international communities such as Dubai.

- v. **Global:** it was suggested that this theme might include continued plans for transnational education campuses, maintaining the same quality across all sites so that students could move between campuses. It was noted that the theme would involve establishing a borderless education with a global reputation, which would require improving the university's reputation for international work and in league tables.
- vi. **Impact:** it was suggested that this theme would include the impact on students and the impact students go on to have externally. The theme relates to widening participation and telling the story of how students come to DMU and what they leave with, demonstrating the impact of the university. It could include students' employability and career development, outreach work to encourage students to enter higher education, civic and community impact in Leicester, and how to market Leicester as a desirable location. It might also include research-empowered teaching and how staff are empowered and encouraged to deliver this within the curriculum, as well as economic impact and research. Additionally, it could include alignment to local skills needs and the wider industrial strategy.

RESOLVED:

That the work initiated here concerning the six themes would feed into future workshops, and that governors would be invited to join those workshops once they had been scheduled.

7 'Higher education in and out of the box'

The Director of the Finsbury Institute at City St George's, University of London, Professor Diana Beech, delivered a presentation focused on the current financial and HE sector context, identifying six key themes of resource, cost, regulatory framework, international students, demographics, and other alternatives. Arising from the discussion of this item, and questions from governors, the following points were highlighted:

- i. It was asked whether the government were likely to start to pressure universities into merging in the near future. It was noted that this was likely and may include financial incentives, encouraging regional thinking, and collaboration with further education institutions.
- ii. It was noted that while it would be sensible to align with policy trends to secure funding, the available funding would remain limited. It was suggested that the university might consider alternative sources of funding, such as the NHS or corporate partners.
- iii. It was suggested that the university consider opportunities to take a different approach and distinguish itself. For example, by strengthening its civic role and aligning more closely with local skills needs and the industrial strategy.
- iv. Questions were raised about the future direction of regulation. It was noted that the OfS was expected to focus on stabilising the HE sector following the appointment of a new Chair, and that around 66% of the government's target funding was likely to shift towards further education rather than higher education.
- v. **[Redacted]**

RESOLVED:

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

Patrick Moody left the meeting at this point

8 Are our plans bold enough? – critical friends

Attendees shared insights based on the discussions, presentations, and activities from the previous sessions. Arising from the discussion of this item, and questions from governors, the following points were highlighted:

- i. Consideration was given to what the university's next bold idea could be following block teaching, one that would push the institution beyond its comfort zone.
- ii. It was suggested that the model for delivering higher education was shifting, and that the university should think about how to respond to these changes, not only through generating new revenue streams but by adapting to emerging educational needs.
- iii. It was observed that small, incremental changes were unlikely to be sufficient. Alternative approaches might include rethinking staffing models and adopting more agile ways of working, including revised reward schemes given the significant cost pressures associated with pensions.
- iv. Suggestions included developing a strategy that anticipated the sector's needs over the next five years, such as using AI to support staffing and reduce costs. Members also proposed enhancing personalised student experiences and exploring new funding opportunities through partnerships.
- v. It was agreed that working groups including governors, students, and staff would be established to develop the strategies further and prioritise the themes.

Shikha Singh left the meeting at this point

9 Pre-mortem exercise

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Planning, Research and Innovation introduced a scenario-planning exercise focused on a potential £28m shortfall arising from changes to immigration rules and the introduction of a cap on international students. Members worked in groups to identify possible causes for the failure. Following group discussions, six key themes emerged:

- i. **Student selection and recruitment:** it was suggested that students should receive clear information about financial expectations and academic requirements. It was also suggested that there was a need for the better alignment of agent incentives to attract suitable applicants and it was recommended that the university consider the greater use of direct recruitment rather than relying on agents to the extent that it did.
- ii. **Data and data quality:** the importance of collecting accurate and reliable data was emphasised, which would be supported by teams with the right expertise to analyse and interpret that data. It was noted that there was a need for a culture that encouraged challenging data that appeared to be incorrect. It was also suggested that students should have access to their own data, helping to ensure accuracy and transparency.
- iii. **Third-party and franchising:** it was suggested that the university's contracts should have clear requirements that set out expectations and ensured strong

management oversight. It was suggested that, where possible, provision should be delivered and managed in-house to minimise risks.

- iv. **Leadership and governance:** it was suggested that appropriate skills and competencies must be present at both board level and within the university's leadership team. It was highlighted that there was a need for timely, high-quality information from management, with effective escalation routes for resolving issues. Additionally, the usefulness of internal audits and assurance processes in preventing failure was highlighted. It was noted that business plans should be diversified, resilient, and subject to stress testing.
- v. **Support for students:** the importance of identifying and supporting students in need was highlighted. It was suggested that academic staff could have student retention metrics incorporated into their performance assessment.
- vi. **Academic support and performance (quality of education):** it was noted that the university would need to detect issues early, well before student outcomes were measured and to address such issues through improvements to teaching quality. It was suggested that there should be a recognition of the consequences of poor outcomes and an introduction of performance management and accountability where necessary. It was also suggested that effective management of the relationship with UKVI and ensuring resilience in response to changes in monitoring officers would be useful in preventing failure.

10 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.

11 Date of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Board of Governors would take place at 10:00 on Thursday 27 November 2025 in The Yard, rooms 3.05 and 3.06.

12 Any other business

No items were raised.

Meeting duration: 10:10-16:25