Minutes:	Board of Governors strategic away day
Time and date:	10:00, Thursday 17 October 2024
Location:	Bede House, room 0.46
Present:	Ian Squires (Chair), Alison Court, Stuart Dawkins, Phil Grierson (to item 4), Vivek Ganotra, Priya Karasala, Jonathan Kerry, Jonathan Mills, Patrick Moody, Abdul Mullick, Katie Normington, Buddy Penfold, Sardip Sandhu, Komal Shahzadi, Beverley Shears (to item 7), Peter Tansley, and Paul Woodgates
In attendance:	Alison Benson, Deputy Secretary and Head of Compliance, Simon Bradbury, Pro Vice-Chancellor International, Jill Cowley, Pro Vice-Chancellor Skills and Training and Dean of Arts, Design and Humanities, Stephen Dale, Director of Campus Innovation (item 7), Bridget Donoghue, Executive Director of People Services, Mel Fowler, Executive Director of Marketing and Communications, Ashwin Gopalakrishnan, EY-Parthenon (items 5 and 6), Tracey Jessup, Chief Transformation and Resources Officer, Mike Kagioglou, Pro Vice-Chancellor Research and Business Innovation, Chloe Keenan, Governance Officer, Debbie Muddimer, Executive Director of Finance and Procurement, Simon Oldroyd, Pro Vice-Chancellor Sustainability and Dean of Health and Life Sciences, Susan Orr, Pro Vice-Chancellor Education and Equalities, Nikki Pierce, Registrar (Academic) and Secretary to the Board of Governors
Secretary:	Nick Jeffs; nick.jeffs@dmu.ac.uk

CONFIRMED

1 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence had been received from governors Peter Collyer and Shikha Singh, and members of the executive Heather McLaughlin and Shushma Patel. Apologies for an early departure had been received from governors Phil Grierson and Beverley Shears.

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   **Sector Context and the Future of Higher Education**

The Vice-Chancellor delivered a presentation concerning the current and future context for the higher education sector in the UK. Arising from the discussion of this item, and questions from governors, the following points were highlighted:

a. It was suggested that there existed the potential for contraction in the sector over time, particularly amongst mid-tariff institutions that had no clear USPs.

b. It was noted that the university had observed short-term decreases in demand in postgraduate taught programmes, most notably in computing and management, which could be linked directly to the reduction in the number of international applicants both at DMU and across the sector more widely. A longer-term decline had been observed in humanities subjects.

c. It was noted that a reduction in 'wraparound' activities, and a move to shared services, were ways in which universities might consider reducing costs.

d. It was felt that the new government had signalled a change of approach to the sector with the appointment of Jacqui Smith as Minister of State for Skills in the Department for Education, and the more welcoming tone it had adopted towards international students. However, it was suggested that the sector was unlikely to see any significant shifts in government policy in the short-term.

e. It was agreed that the further development of DMU's relationships with industry would be a key driver of future success, and an area in which the university should focus in the coming years.

f. It was recognised that there would likely be varying degrees of appetite for change amongst staff, and that it would, therefore, be important for change to be managed effectively and appropriately.

g. It was noted that there had been little in the way of demand for two-year degree programmes across the sector but that DMU would be open to exploring this area should it observes demand increasing sufficiently.

4   **Workshop: Four Possible Futures for English Higher Education**

The Vice-Chancellor, and the Deputy Chair of the Board, led a workshop entitled, 'Four Possible Futures for English Higher Education'. Attendees were asked to discuss in groups four hypothetical scenarios that were informed by a number of factors: extent of demand (either growth or contraction) and extent of sector reform (either transformational change or incremental change). The feedback on each scenario was as follows:

a. Scenario 1: Growth and transformational change

- Under this scenario, it would be important to consider the impact of lifelong learning and changes that might being about in terms of where learning actually takes place, for example in industry.

- Similarly, employability might also become a driver for changes in provision and the delivery of that provision.

- Diversification of income would continue to be important, as would taking advantage of local and regional partnerships, alongside the continued (but appropriate) expansion of transnational education.

- It was recognised that DMU as a whole was a large organisation, and so may not be able to move quickly at all times, but that elements of the institution should be alive to, and be empowered to react to, opportunities as they arose.

b. <u>Scenario 2: Contraction and transformational change</u>

- Under this scenario, the university would need to choose carefully the areas in which it wished to focus, identifying and prioritising high-quality sources of revenue. Rationalisation would likely need to take place, both in terms of the academic portfolio and the university's estate, in order to operate as efficiently as possible whilst still delivering at volume.
- There would need to be a greater focus on the consumer, with the university being able to react to opportunities as they emerged, both in terms of new ventures, but also to maximise existing partnerships – academic and with industry – in the UK and overseas.
- The university would need to continue to innovate in its approaches to pedagogy, including expanding its block provision with more entry points, and rethinking assessment methods using modern technologies.

c. <u>Scenario 3: Growth and incremental change</u>

- Under this scenario, DMU would need to identify and expand upon its USPs, particularly block learning, and the university's sustainability-related initiatives.
- Consideration could be given to breaking down block learning into smaller chunks, thus allowing DMU to develop a new delivery model that could allow the university to compete in other, non-traditional markets, and potentially be licensed for use by other organisations.

d. <u>Scenario 4: Contractions and incremental change</u>

- Under this scenario, the university would need to consider carefully where elements of its portfolio might be suspended or withdrawn outright, particularly if doing so might avoid duplication of provision both within DMU and the wider local region.
- It would be important to double-down on DMU's strengths, including its connections to Leicester, Leicestershire, and the East Midlands more broadly, and the applied and vocational nature of some of its programmes.
- It would also be important for the university to be more commercially minded, with a focus on making data-driven decisions about its portfolio, and developing its links with industry and employers to address local skills gaps.

In summing up the feedback, it was noted that all of the groups had approached the scenarios from a position of confidence, recognising that DMU had the ability and energy to respond to a range of challenges. However, it was noted that the university would need to remain cognisant of the various risks associated with each of the four scenarios.

Phil Grierson left the meeting at this point

5   The State of the UK Higher Education Sector

Ashwin Gopalakrishnan of EY-Parthenon delivered a presentation entitled, 'The State of the UK Higher Education Sector'. Arising from the discussion of this item, and questions from governors, the following points were highlighted:

a. In discussing the prospect of mergers within the sector, it was noted that numbers had been fairly limited in the past, particularly in the UK, although there were

examples of successful mergers and takeovers amongst private universities in Europe, and colleges in the US.

    b. It was recognised that AI would have a significant impact on the job market, and that equipping students with the ability to use such tools would stand them in good stead for their future careers.

    c. It was agreed that managing change at scale could be difficult, but also that it could be done (and at pace) as evidenced by the rapid shift to online delivery and home working during the COVID-19 pandemic.

6   Workshop: The State of the UK Higher Education Sector

The Vice-Chancellor, and the Deputy Chair of the Board, led a workshop that focussed on a discussion of the implications for DMU of the points raised in Ashwin Gopalakrishnan's presentation under the previous item. Arising from that discussion, the following points were highlighted:

    i.   It was recognised that DMU was well-placed within the sector in many ways, and was already engaged in some of the key areas of opportunity outlined in the presentation, including employability, digital transformation, and AI.

    ii.   It was suggested that it would be important for the university's employability offer to focus on preparing students for their first job following graduation, but also to equip them with the skills to continue in their career after that first role. Consideration might also be given as to the role the university could play in supporting younger people who are not in or looking for work to enter the job market.

    iii.   It was recognised that industry still needed to do more to define the skills it required from graduates, particularly with regards to AI. It was agreed that it would be important for this to be better defined so that provision could be more effectively matched to need.

    iv.   The university might aim for modest growth over the coming years but would need to identify which areas of its provision that it would seek to grow – and invest in them appropriately – whilst also considering which areas might need to be suspended or withdrawn entirely (bearing in mind the commercial implications of doing so).

    v.   It would be important for DMU to decide what kind of university it wanted to be and how it would differentiate itself form other institutions i.e. to what extent would it balance teaching and research; how would it continue to innovate in terms of pedagogy, assessment and the use of AI; and how would it approach and develop its links to industry.

    vi.   It would be important for the university to decide to which of its UK and international partnerships – both existing and potential – it should commit, and which ones might not be pursed any further or at all. It was suggested that the university may also wish to think differently about its international campuses, with more of a focus on a worldwide 'digital campus' rather than physical locations in different countries.

    vii.   It was suggested that it would be critical for the executive to take ownership of developing strategies aimed at addressing the issues and opportunities raised in the presentation, but that it would also need to be cognisant of the impact of significant organisational change on DMU's culture, and of managing that change effectively.

    viii.   It was agreed that it would be useful for the university's response to the presentation to be explored in a report that would be submitted for consideration by the board at a future meeting.

RESOLVED:

That a report exploring the university's response to the issues and opportunities raised in the EY-Parthenon presentation be brought to the board at a future meeting.

7   Update on the Estates Masterplan

The Pro Vice-Chancellor Research and Business Innovation, and the Director of Campus Innovation, delivered a presentation concerning the progress made to date on the development of the university's new Estates Masterplan. Arising from the discussion of this item, and questions from governors, the following points were highlighted:

a. It was noted that there would be future challenges around changing working practices and spaces, particularly as pedagogy moved towards a greater use of digital technologies. It was suggested that this might, for example, mean a transition away from more traditional approaches to teaching and working, such as lecture theatres and offices, towards more collaborative spaces and a greater use of shared facilities.
b. It was agreed that the university should progress its work on the digital campus alongside the development of its physical estate, and that it would be useful to articulate how different spaces were used and how much revenue was generated from each of them.
c. It was agreed that it would be important for the university's campus to continue to feel unique, and to speak to the history, identity, and values of DMU. It was recognised that the campus and its buildings were special to both staff and students, and thought would need to be given as to how to manage carefully the transition to a smaller physical footprint, and the impact that would have on individuals and teams.
d. It was agreed that it would be important for the university to come to a realistic view on the amount of revenue that might be generated from the divestment of buildings, as well as the commercial exploitation of spaces on campus via leases or other arrangements.
e. It was agreed that further updates on the development of the masterplan would be shared with the board in due course.

Beverley Shears left the meeting at this point

8   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.

9   Date of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Board of Governors would take place at 10:00 on Thursday 28 November 2024 in The Yard, rooms 3.05 and 3.06.

10   Any other business

No items of other business were raised.

Meeting duration: 10:00-15:42