

<b>Minutes:</b>	Board of Governors
<b>Time and date:</b>	10:00, Thursday 26 September 2024
<b>Location:</b>	Bede House, room 0.46
<b>Present:</b>	Ian Squires (Chair), Peter Collyer, Alison Court, Phil Grierson, Vivek Ganotra, Priya Karasala (for items 3-14), Jonathan Kerry, Jonathan Mills, Katie Normington, Buddy Penfold, Sardip Sandhu, Komal Shahzadi (for items 3-14), Shikha Singh, and Paul Woodgates
<b>In attendance:</b>	Alison Benson, Deputy Secretary and Head of Compliance, Lawrence D'Souza, Director of International (item 15), John Hurst, Director of Strategic Planning and Insight (item 10), Mike Kagioglou, Pro Vice-Chancellor Research and Business Innovation (items 13 and 14), Chloe Keenan, Governance Officer, Debbie Muddimer, Executive Director of Finance and Procurement, Susan Orr, Pro Vice-Chancellor Education and Equalities (item 10), Nikki Pierce, Registrar (Academic) and Secretary to the Board of Governors
<b>Secretary:</b>	Nick Jeffs; <a href="mailto:nick.jeffs@dmu.ac.uk">nick.jeffs@dmu.ac.uk</a>

*CONFIRMED*

### **1 Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence had been received from Stuart Dawkins, Patrick Moody, Abdul Mullick, Beverley Shears, and Peter Tansley.

### **2 Declarations of any pecuniary, family or other personal interests**

In light of his role as Director General for Energy Markets and Supply at the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, Jonathan Mills noted the potential for a conflict of interest to arise during the discussion of item 9.

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.

### **3 Appointment of the student governors**

The Registrar (Academic) and Secretary to the Board introduced a report [3] concerning the appointment of Priya Karasala and Komal Shahzadi, who had been nominated by De Montfort Students' Union, as the board's student governors for 2024/25.

It was noted that the students' union's nominations had come later in the year than anticipated and so it had not been possible for the university to conduct the internal 'fit and proper person' and due diligence checks that were carried out for all new

appointments to the board. It was agreed, therefore, that the appointment of the student governors would be subject to the satisfactory completion of these checks, the results of which would be communicated to the board in due course.

RESOLVED:

- a. That Priya Karasala and Komal Shahzadi be appointed as the board's student governors for 2024/25, subject to the satisfactory completion of the university's internal 'fit and proper person' and due diligence checks.
- b. That the results of the internal checks be shared with the board in due course.

*Priya Karasala and Komal Shahzadi were welcomed to the meeting at this point*

#### **4 Minutes of the previous meeting**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes [4] of the 4 July 2024 meeting of the Board of Governors be approved.

#### **5 Matters arising**

All of the matters arising [5] had either been completed or were scheduled for consideration at a future meeting of the board.

#### **6 Report from the Chair**

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

- i. The Chair highlighted a number of adjustments to the template in which the board papers were written. These adjustments were aimed at making clearer the purpose of each paper, as well as providing greater clarity of why a paper was being brought to the board.
- ii. Independent governor Vivek Ganotra had volunteered to serve as mentor to the two student governors.
- iii. The university had begun the process of identifying a supplier who would conduct an external review of the effectiveness of the board and DMU's governance processes. It was hoped that a supplier would be formally appointed in the coming weeks, and that the review would commence in November 2024.
- iv. The recruitment exercises for the new independent governors, and governor apprentices, continued. It was hoped that any new appointments would be in place before the end of the calendar year.
- v. Governors were reminded of visits to the university's Drawing Centre, and the students' union's Welcome Fair, both of which would take place following the meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

#### **7 Report from the Vice-Chancellor**

The Vice-Chancellor introduced a report [7] 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. **[Redacted]**
- ii. **[Redacted]**
- iii. **[Redacted]** It was recognised that Clearing had been particularly difficult this year due to intense competition from mid- and high-tariff universities seeking to bolster their domestic student populations in response to a sector-wide decline in international applicants. It was noted that the board would receive a fuller update on student recruitment at its meeting on 28 November 2024, following the closure of registration for programmes commencing in the autumn.
- iv. The board welcomed the fact that the university had seen some small improvements in its league table positions, but noted that these publications continued to use old data, and that none of them yet used data from the National Student Survey results of students who had studied via block teaching (which were expected to feature from 2025 onwards). It was also noted that the university had launched a working group to explore what might be done to further improve DMU's league table positions.
- v. Regarding the internal audit of the DMU's Higher Education Students Early Statistics return submission, it was noted that the issues identified by KPMG were the result of data errors that the university had not been able to correct in time. It was noted that the data had since been corrected in the Higher Education Statistics Agency return and that university management had provided a formal response to the auditors' findings.
- vi. Regarding the university's Research and Innovation Institutes, it was noted applications for membership of an institute would be considered on an annual basis, and that appointments were based on a number of factors, including the quality of research outputs and success in winning research grants.
- vii. It was agreed that it would be important for the university to celebrate and promote its successes across a broader range of metrics, in addition to the more well-known national and international league tables. It was felt that the university should continue to build a narrative about itself, marking and celebrating its successes, and having them become part of the overall story of DMU. It was noted that this would be raised as a priority for the Marketing and Communications team and the incoming Head of the Vice-Chancellor's Office.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

## **8 Report from the Student Governors**

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

- i. The students' union's Welcome Fair was ongoing, with a particular focus on supporting new students in their first term at university, and encouraging them to volunteer to serve as student representatives.
- ii. The union's Executive Officers were focussing on developing sports clubs' links with DMUsport, as well as encouraging a greater level of engagement with sport amongst international students by offering financial support and reduced or free membership fees.
- iii. The union was gathering feedback from students on block teaching, as well as supporting the university in conversations with the OfS around its Teaching Excellence Framework and the Access and Participation Plan submissions.

- iv. The union would be reviewing its elements of its governance arrangements, including the roles of its Executive Officers, and the earlier nomination of student governors.

RESOLVED:

That the update be noted.

## **9 The post-general election political and regulatory landscape**

The Vice-Chancellor and Registrar (Academic) and Secretary to the Board introduced a report [9] concerning an overview of the changes in the political landscape, following the general election held in July 2024, and the election of a new Labour government. The report also outlined developments in the higher education regulatory landscape, following the publication of Sir David Behan's independent review of the OfS. Arising from the discussion of this item, and questions from governors, the following points were highlighted:

- i. It was felt that higher education had not been a key priority for any political party prior to the election, but that that position appeared to be changing with the appointment of Jacqui Smith as Minister of State for Skills in the Department for Education, and the more welcoming tone the new government had adopted towards international students.
- ii. It was suggested that the new government saw universities as a key part of the solution to some of the UK's skills deficits, as well as the implementation of the Lifelong Learning Entitlement in the coming years.
- iii. Overall, it was felt that the sector might see some significant changes or government interventions in future years, but that the short-term position was likely to remain relatively stable.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

## **10 National Student Survey 2024 results**

The Pro Vice-Chancellor (PVC) Education and Equalities and Director of Strategic Planning and Insight introduced a report [10] concerning the DMU's performance in the 2024 National Student Survey (NSS), and the actions that would be taken by the university in response to its results. Arising from the discussion of this item, and questions from governors, the following points were highlighted:

- i. It was noted that the 2025 NSS would be the first time the survey would be completed by students who had studied via block learning. Evidence from internal measures, such as the student experience tracker and university student surveys, indicated continuing improvements in student satisfaction, and it was hoped that this would be reflected in next year's NSS.
- ii. It was suggested that it would be useful for the university to consider where KPTs relating to the student experience might be stretched with a view to accelerating improvements in this area.
- iii. It was noted that the university had made targeted interventions in areas that had underperformed in the NSS. These interventions were being pitched very clearly as offers of support rather than reprimands for poor performance, and had been received well by staff. It was also noted that the Annual Enhancement Review

- process had helped to make staff more familiar with some of the metrics around their programmes in advance of the NSS results being made available.
- iv. It was noted that the university intended to work with the students' union to provide more support to the student representative system, and to make sure that it was working as effectively as possible at programme level.
  - v. It was suggested that it would be useful for the university to review again its communications to both staff and students around the NSS to ensure that these were as effective as possible.

RESOLVED:

That the results of the 2024 NSS, as outlined in the report, be noted.

## **11 2023/24 financial outturn update**

The Executive Director of Finance and Procurement introduced a report [11] concerning an overview of the draft financial outturn position for the 2023/24 academic year. Arising from the discussion of this item, and questions from governors, the following points were highlighted:

- i. The board commended the positive forecast outturn position, particularly in light of the financial challenges faced during the course of the year.
- ii. It was noted that the external auditors were making good progress, and it was hoped that the delays seen in the previous year in them coming to a final opinion would not be repeated again this year. It was agreed that the board would be kept apprised of any issues should they develop.
- iii. It was noted that the introduction of an April intake for postgraduate taught programmes had had a positive impact on income from tuition fees.
- iv. It was noted that the university would be reviewing its capital programme in order to identify areas where savings might be made by prioritising essential spending. This review would include consideration of the best way forward for some of the university's larger capital projects, including the redevelopment of the library and the installation of the low carbon heat network.

RESOLVED:

That the draft financial outturn position for the year ended 31 July 2024, which was still subject to the completion of the external audit, be noted.

## **12 Medium-term Financial Plan**

The Executive Director of Finance and Procurement introduced a report [12] concerning the actions being taken in respect of the university's Medium-Term Financial Plan, with a particular focus on the actions relating to the 2024/25 budget. Arising from the discussion of this item, and questions from governors, the following points were highlighted:

- i. It was noted that the list of potential actions to address current and future challenges would continue to be refined as the university's financial position going into 2024/25 became clearer. It was recognised that there were currently a number of 'unknowns' that had the potential to change the picture significantly, including the final position in terms of student recruitment for the autumn, the impact of any potential future voluntary severance scheme, and the impact of the recruitment to the January 2025 student intake.

- ii. It was suggested that it would be useful for the university to develop some scenarios as to how the potential actions might be prioritised, and a set of principles on which that prioritisation would be implemented. It was suggested that it would also be useful to explore the risks of each potential action, as well as their wider impact across a range of different measures rather than purely financial.
- iii. It was intended that the impact on students of any potential future voluntary severance scheme would be minimal, with applications only being accepted where the negative implications for the student experience were anticipated to be limited.
- iv. It was recognised that, despite the forecast challenges, DMU was still in a relatively strong position due to its healthy cash reserve and was still able to have positive discussions about future developments.
- v. It was noted that a revised budget for 2024/25, which would be updated to account for the final position in terms of student registration for programmes commencing in the autumn, would be submitted to the 13 November 2024 and 28 November 2024 meetings of the Finance and Performance Committee and Board of Governors respectively.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

### **13 Research and Business Innovation update**

The PVC Research and Business Innovation introduced a report [13] concerning an overview of the university's current Research and Business Innovation activity, including key successes, forthcoming developments, and strategic priorities. Arising from the discussion of this item, and questions from governors, the following points were highlighted:

- i. It was recognised that the university intended to develop its reputation for research, and that the professoriate would continue to be engaged concerning research activity.
- ii. It was noted that research and innovation activities would need to be connected to avoid competing priorities, moving away from past siloed processes that had impacted knowledge innovation, and to enable the development of a pipeline of future operations.
- iii. Once the Research and Innovation Institutes (RIIs) had been fully embedded, a reflection process would be undertaken in order to ensure that each RII had a clear strategy and vision. A session with RII members would be held in October 2024 to help define the vision and aims of the institutes.
- iv. The university would continue to learn how other institutions used research institutes but it was noted that, given the variety of institutions, it would be difficult to emulate others. However, opportunities might exist for potential local engagement such as partnership arrangements.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

### **14 Transnational education and DMU London update**

The Vice-Chancellor, PVC Research and Business Innovation, and the Director of International, introduced a report [14] concerning an update on some of the university's

significant transitional education projects, and the development of a campus in London. Arising from the discussion of this item, and questions from governors, the following points were highlighted:

- i. It was noted that the university continued to manage its exit from its relationship with Study World, its former partner in its Dubai operations, and that DMU continued to seek legal advice, as appropriate, to support that exit.
- ii. It was noted that the university had communicated the changes in its Dubai operations to affected staff and students. It was felt that the changes had been well-received overall, and the university would be working to address the concerns raised by some around the implications of relocating to a different part of Dubai.
- iii. It was recognised that DMU's involvement in the Pharma Park in Uzbekistan was more limited than in Dubai, Kazakhstan and Cambodia, with programmes being taught as part of a franchise agreement, and the university being responsible for the quality assurance of those programmes.
- iv. It was agreed that it would be useful for summaries of the university's UK and international partnerships to be shared with the board.

RESOLVED:

- a. That the report be noted.
- b. That summaries of the university's UK and international partnerships would be shared with the board.

*Priya Karasala and Komal Shahzadi left the meeting at this point*

## **15 UKVI update**

The Registrar (Academic) and Secretary to the Board a report [15] concerning an update on the university's student sponsor licence, and the outcome of the visit from United Kingdom Visas and Immigration (UKVI) that took place in December 2023. Arising from the discussion of this item, and questions from governors, the following points were highlighted:

- i. It was recognised that the outcome of the UKVI visit had the potential to be significant for the university, particularly if that outcome was negative.
- ii. It was noted that the university would continue to seek legal advice regarding its position, and would continue to raise its concerns with UKVI.
- iii. It was recognised that the university had worked hard to address challenges around its non-completion data, and that it would be difficult to forecast accurately the final position in terms of the Non-Completion Rate for 2023/24 as UKVI did not publish its methodology for determining this metric. However, it was noted that the internal auditors were supporting the university by undertaking a review of this area and would provide a full report to a future meeting of the Audit and Risk Committee.
- iv. It was agreed that, should there be any UKVI-related developments ahead of the board's next meeting, these would be circulated via email at the earliest opportunity.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

## 16 Annual Report from lead governors for Ofsted

The Registrar (Academic) and Secretary to the Board, and one of the lead governors for Ofsted and skills, Jonathan Kerry, introduced a report [16] concerning an overview of the activities of the lead governors during the 2023/24 academic year. Arising from the discussion of this item, and questions from governors, the following points were highlighted:

- i. It was felt that the university had a positive and transparent relationship with the lead governors, and that requests for information were responded to in a timely manner.
- ii. It was noted that the university had made significant improvements in regulatory compliance during 2023/24, including achieving 'satisfactory' outcomes in Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) audits, and an outcome of 'significant assurance with minor improvement opportunities' from an internal audit of ESFA funding compliance for apprenticeships.
- iii. The board noted its thanks to Stuart Dawkins and Jonathan Kerry for their continuing work as lead governors.

RESOLVED:

That the activities undertaken by the lead governors, as outlined the report, be noted.

## 17 Member's updates

i. Audit and Risk Committee

The Audit and Risk Committee had not met since the board's last meeting on 4 July 2024, therefore there was no update to provide.

ii. Finance and Performance Committee

The Finance and Performance Committee had not met since the board's last meeting on 4 July 2024, therefore there was no update to provide.

iii. People and Culture Committee

The People and Culture Committee had not met since the board's last meeting on 4 July 2024, therefore there was no update to provide.

iv. Lead governors for Ofsted and skills

The annual report from the lead governors for Ofsted had been considered at item 16. In light of this, there was no further update to provide.

v. Academic Board

The Academic Board had not met since the board's last meeting on 4 July 2024, therefore there was no update to provide. However, it was noted that the unconfirmed minutes of the 26 June 2024 meeting of the Academic Board were included at item 21.

RESOLVED:



That the updates be noted.

## **18 Annual governor appraisal process (2023/24)**

The Chair of the Board introduced a report [18] concerning the outcomes of appraisal meetings held with governors during summer 2024, as well as a proposed training and development plan for the 2024/25 academic year, which had been informed by those appraisal meetings. Arising from the discussion of this item, and questions from governors, the following points were highlighted:

- i. It was noted that feedback from presenters at board and committee meetings had been positive.
- ii. It was noted that the Chair of the Board would be authoring a future issue of the 'VC Weekly' newsletter, which would be used to raise awareness of the board and its work.
- iii. It was suggested that an additional, less formal, dinner would be held or governors the evening prior to the board's meeting in February 2025.
- iv. It was agreed that consideration would be given as to how to further develop the role of the student governors, including making their report to the board more formal, and holding briefings with them ahead of board meetings.

RESOLVED:

- a. That the governor appraisal report, and the findings of the annual governor appraisal process conducted by the Chair of the Board of Governors. be noted.
- b. That the proposed governor development plan for the 2024/25 academic year be approved.

## **19 Board of Governors' annual effectiveness self-assessment**

The Registrar (Academic) and Secretary to the Board a report [19] concerning the results of the board's annual effectiveness self-assessment survey for the 2023/24 academic year. Arising from the discussion of this item, and questions from governors, the following points were highlighted:

- i. The board's assessment of its effectiveness had been positive overall although there were a number of areas that governors felt could be improved, including the diversity of the board, the accessibility of meetings in certain rooms, and oversight of performance in relation to the university's strategic goals. It was noted that the actions arising from the survey, and the annual appraisal process, would be developed into a formal action plan, which would be shared with the board in due course.
- ii. It was hoped that the response rate would be improved in future years, noting that only 10 governors had completed the survey on this occasion. It was agreed that the Governance Office would support this improvement by chasing for responses ahead of the survey closing.

RESOLVED:

- a. That the report be noted.
- b. That the actions arising from the survey, and the annual appraisal process, would be developed into a formal action plan, which would be shared with the board in due course.

**20 Secretary's Report**

The Registrar (Academic) and Secretary to the Board introduced a report [20] concerning the annual overview of governor training and expenses for the period 1 August 2023 to 31 July 2024, and an overview of the board's Register of Interests, following its annual update, and prior to its publication on the university's website.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

**21 Unconfirmed minutes of the 26 June 2024 meeting of the Academic Board**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes [21] be noted.

**22 Student Experience Programme update**

RESOLVED:

That the report [22] be noted.

**23 Items placed under the university seal**

RESOLVED:

That the report [23] be noted.

**24 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.

**25 Date of the next meeting**

The Board of Governors' strategic away day would take place at 10:00 on Thursday 17 October 2024 in Bede House, room 0.46.

**26 Any other business**

No items of other business were raised.

*Ian Squires left the meeting for the following item*

**27 Appraisal of the Chair of the Board 2024**

The Deputy Chair of the Board introduced a report [27] concerning the appraisal of the Chair of the Board, which had been conducted during summer 2024. Arising from the discussion of this item, and questions from governors, the following points were highlighted:

- i. The Deputy Chair thanked those members of the board, and of the university's executive, who had provided feedback as part of the appraisal process.

- ii. Members of the board felt that the comments, observations, and reflections contained within the report were representative of their experiences of the Chair of the Board.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

*Meeting duration: 10:00-14:16*