

Minutes:	Board of Governors
Time and date:	10:00, Thursday 27 February 2025
Location:	The Yard, rooms 3.05 and 3.06
Present:	Ian Squires (Chair), Shreena Dasani, Stuart Dawkins, Vivek Ganotra (until item 89), Phil Grierson, Jonathan Kerry, Jonathan Mills, Patrick Moody, Abdul Mullick, Katie Normington, Judith Olurankinse, Buddy Penfold, Sardip Sandhu, Shikha Singh, Peter Tansley (from item 83), and Paul Woodgates (until item 90)
In attendance:	Alison Benson, Deputy Secretary and Head of Compliance, Sarah Bradley, Chief Executive Office, De Montfort Students' Union (item 94), Lawrence D'Souza, Director of International (item 92), Mel Fowler, Executive Director of Marketing and Communications (items 85 and 86), Tracey Jessup, Chief Transformation and Resources Officer (items 90 and 91), Mike Kagioglou, Deputy Vice-Chancellor Planning, Research and Innovation (item 90), Chloe Keenan, Governance Officer, Debbie Muddimer, Executive Director of Finance and Procurement, Susan Orr, Deputy Vice-Chancellor Education and Equalities (item 91), Sushma Patel, Pro Vice-Chancellor Artificial Intelligence and Dean of Computing, Engineering and Media (item 92), Nikki Pierce, Registrar (Academic) and Secretary to the Board of Governors
Secretary:	Nick Jeffs; nick.jeffs@dmu.ac.uk

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78 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Tamera Campbell, Alison Court, Priya Karasala and Beverley Shears. Apologies for a late arrival had been received from Peter Tansley, and apologies for an early departure had been received from Vivek Ganotra and Paul Woodgates.

79 Declarations of any pecuniary, family or other personal interests

Phil Grierson declared a conflict of interest in relation to item 88.

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.

80 Decision taken between meetings

RESOLVED:

- a. That the decision to approve the appointment of Tamera Campbell as an independent governor, which was taken between meetings, be noted.
- b. [Redacted]

81 Minutes of previous meetings and matters arising

In discussing the matters arising, it was noted that the university would not be utilising the funding that had been secured from the Green Heat Network Fund. The board had already approved the decision not to proceed with the original heat pump proposal, and the executive had agreed that it would not be feasible to plan and implement a suitable alternative solution that made use of the funding by the deadline of May 2026.

RESOLVED:

- a. That the minutes of the 28 November 2024 [81a] and 12 December 2024 [81b] meetings of the Board of Governors be approved.
- b. That it be noted that the remaining matters arising had either been completed or were scheduled for consideration at a future meeting of the board.

82 Report from the Chair

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

- i. The review of the effectiveness of governance at DMU, which was being conducted by Halpin, would shortly be drawing to a close. It was hoped that the final report of the review would be shared with the university, and the steering group overseeing the process on behalf of the board, in April.
- ii. The recruitment process for governors with expertise in audit was ongoing. It was hoped that interviews would be held shortly.
- iii. Governors were reminded of their invitation to join a tour of the DMU's Innovation Centre, which would take place following the meeting. It was noted that, at its meeting on 13 February, the Finance and Performance Committee had approved the university's proposal to purchase the building in which the Innovation Centre was located.

RESOLVED:

That the update be noted.

Peter Tansley joined the meeting at this point

83 Report from the Vice-Chancellor

The Vice-Chancellor introduced a report [83] 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. It was noted that the Academic Board had approved the academic case for the faculty merger at its meeting on 29 January.
- ii. It was noted that the university's National Student Survey response rate was currently 51%; it was hoped that the response rate would reach at least 60% by April.

- iii. It was noted that the Library Project Board had taken the decision to pause the redevelopment plan. The immediate focus would instead be on essential maintenance.
- iv. **[Redacted]**

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

84 Report from the Student Governors

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

- i. The Student Leadership Elections had been launched, which sought to identify who would lead the students' union for the 2025/26 academic year. Candidates would be elected to the roles of Student Voice Leaders, Student Liberation Officers, and Faculty Lead Representatives.
- ii. 'Welcome refresh' events had been held for new students who had joined the university as part of the January 2025 intake.
- iii. The union had collaborated with Leicester Comedy Festival.
- iv. The union had begun making preparations for the annual varsity sporting competition with the University of Leicester.
- v. There had been an increase in students' engagement with, and membership of, clubs and societies.

RESOLVED:

That the update be noted.

85 Recruitment and admissions update

The Executive Director of Marketing and Communications introduced a report [85] 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. The board welcomed the positive movement on international recruitment, noting that this had helped to move the university closer to its forecast position. It was noted that this improved position was being seen across the sector and it was hoped, therefore, that this in turn would lead to a more positive experience for DMU in Clearing later in the year.
- ii. DMU's position in terms of the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service had begun to show improvements but was still down on the previous year. The data continued to evidence a particular challenge around recruitment in the Leicester/Leicestershire area, which, appeared to be as a result of potential applicants from the region favouring alternative routes to further study such as apprenticeships. The university would continue to analyse this 'Leicester effect' and consider what mitigations might be introduced to minimise its impact on DMU.
- iii. It was suggested that the University of Leicester was also likely to be feeling the effect of this issue although it would likely be less exposed given its stronger pull nationally.
- iv. **[Redacted]**

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

86 Marketing and recruitment update

The Executive Director of Marketing and Communications 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. It was agreed that that the university's proposition was based around it being the 'Empowering University' with a particular focus on innovative pedagogy and strong support in terms of employability. However, the board were keen to seek assurance that the university's message was the right one – that the university was being clear about what it was 'selling' and what made DMU stand out from its competitors – and that that message was landing with applicants in the way in which it was intended.
- ii. The board welcomed the work that the university had done over the past year to develop its marketing strategy, including the introduction of the 'DMU Champions' and the 'Campaign of Celebration'. It was suggested that the success of these initiatives would be measured over time across the full length of the recruitment cycle, but in particular during Clearing and at the September/October entry point.
- iii. It was recognised that the university faced a number of challenges in terms of student recruitment, including: the general attractiveness of Leicester as a student city; competition from the University of Leicester and other local competitors; and DMU's league table position. It was also recognised that the pressure on low tariff institutions such as DMU had been consistent over a number of years and that this pressure had become more pronounced across the past few recruitment cycles.
- iv. Regarding leagues tables, it was noted that the university hoped to strengthen its position via improvements to its National Student Survey results. It was suggested that it would be useful for the board to explore some of the work that the university had been doing in relation to its league table performance. It was agreed that this work would be considered at the board's next meeting.
- v. It was recognised that social media was one of the key drivers of applications to study at the university, with over 50% of applicants coming to the DMU website via social media platforms. It was noted that DMU would be utilising business partners, and a social media strategist, in order to ensure that its messaging across the institution was cohesive and coordinated, and to help leverage a more diverse array of voices in support of the university's marketing efforts.
- vi. It was noted that the current competitive nature of undergraduate recruitment was likely to continue, at least in the short term.
- vii. It was suggested that it would be useful for the university to consider where it might be more aggressive or responsive in the development of its portfolio of programmes of study.
- viii. Following this discussion, it was suggested that it would be useful for the board to return to the same subject at its next meeting in order to explore further the ongoing development of DMU's approach to marketing, and to consider the outcome of an external assessment of the extent to which the university's strategy was 'landing' as part of its messaging to potential applicants.

RESOLVED:

- a. That the presentation be noted.
- b. That the board would consider at its next meeting the work that the university had been doing around its league table performance.
- c. That the board would consider at its next meeting a further update on the university's marketing strategy.

87 Financial update

The Executive Director of Finance and Procurement introduced a report [87] concerning the university's financial performance Quarter 2 of the 2024/25 academic year, as well as an update on the ongoing work on the Medium-term Financial Plan.

Governors were also provided with a summary of the university's financial performance during 2023/24 relative to other UK universities, which was based on data collected and presented by WonkHE. It was agreed that governors would be provided with the link to the WonkHE website so that they could explore the data themselves.

RESOLVED:

- a. That the year-to-date operating deficit (before pension valuation and the gain/loss on investment) at Quarter 2 of £8.6m be noted.
- b. That the Quarter 2 full-year forecast of a £30m deficit be noted.
- c. That the update on the Medium-Term Financial Plan be noted.
- d. That the link to the WonkHE website be shared with governors following the meeting.

88 [Redacted]

89 Response to objectives set by the Board of Governors

The Vice-Chancellor introduced a report [89] concerning the response of the University Leadership Board to the strategic objectives set by the Board of Governors at its Away Day in October 2024. Arising from the discussion of this item, and questions from governors, the following points were highlighted:

- i. It was suggested that it would be useful for the university to consider how it might reward/recognise innovation, and how it might integrate the marketing of intellectual property and innovation into the research and development process.
- ii. In discussing the role played by the university's Research and Innovation Institutes, it was suggested that governors be invited to the launch event taking place on 31 March 2025.

RESOLVED:

- a. That the responses to the objectives arising from the board's away day, as outlined in the report, be noted.
- b. That governors would be invited to attend the launch event for the university's Research and Innovation Institutes, which would be taking place on 31 March 2025.

Vivek Ganotra left the meeting at this point

90 Campus Masterplan and Smart Campus Strategy

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor Planning, Research and Innovation, and the Chief Transformation and Resources Officer, introduced a report [90] concerning an overview of the proposed strategic approach to the development of the university's estate over the next 10-year period (the Campus Masterplan 2025-2035), including the delivery of a 'Smart Campus Vision' for DMU. In addition, the Chair of the Finance and Performance Committee provided the board with a summary of the committee's consideration of this item at its meeting on 13 February 2025. Arising from the discussion of this item, and questions from governors, the following points were highlighted:

- i. It was recognised that the proposed divestments outlined in the plan would help the university to achieve some of its planned efficiencies.
- ii. It was noted that students would begin to see some of the changes on campus shortly, particularly in the library with an increase in the amount of collaborative space. It was recognised that there was likely to be some short-term disruption for staff and students on campus whilst demolition and building work took place.
- iii. It was recognised that the university would need to remain agile in its planning to ensure that changes in certain parameters, such as student numbers, could be accounted for in the physical and digital estate.

RESOLVED:

- a. That the DMU Campus Masterplan 2025-2035 be endorsed.
- b. That the DMU Smart Campus Vision be endorsed.

Paul Woodgates left the meeting at this point

91 DMU Future Pedagogy update

The Chief Transformation and Resources Officer and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Education and Equalities delivered a presentation concerning the 'Future Pedagogies' work being undertaken at DMU, which represented an exploration of the ways in which the university could seamlessly integrate on-campus, online, and remote learning to support students.

The board welcomed the work that had been carried out to date, and the planned next steps. It was agreed that Future Pedagogies should form the subject of the next governor drop-in session so that the idea could be explored and discussed in greater detail.

RESOLVED:

- a. That the presentation be noted.
- b. That Future Pedagogies would be explored in greater detail at the next governor drop-in session.

92 [Redacted]

93 Corporate Risk Register update

The Vice-Chancellor introduced a report [93] concerning the university's corporate risk register. In discussing this item it was noted that the risk environment in which the university operated was changing and that, as a result, the Audit and Risk Committee would be adopting a risk-based agenda for future meetings.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

94 De Montfort Students' Union Annual Impact Report

The CEO of De Montfort Students' Union introduced the union's Annual Impact Report for the 2023/24 academic year.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

95 Member's updates

i. Audit and Risk Committee

The Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee noted the following from the committee's meeting on 10 February 2025:

- The committee had received an update on the management of the university's strategic portfolio.
- The committee had considered one 'partial assurance' internal audit report around student complaints. It was noted that the issues identified in the report had since been addressed.

ii. Finance and Performance Committee

The Chair of the Board noted that the majority of the items that had been considered by the committee at its meeting on 13 February had already been considered by the board earlier in the agenda. However, it was noted that the committee had also considered and approved the university's purchase of the building housing its Innovation Centre, as well as revisions to the university's Procurement Policy.

iii. People and Culture Committee

In the absence of the Chair of the People and Culture Committee, no update was provided. However, it was noted that the unconfirmed minutes of the 23 January 2025 meeting of the committee were included at item 99.

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:

- The lead governors had taken part in 'learning walks' allowing them to observe first-hand some of the university's skills provision.
- The university's Education Academy was working on the development of training for staff who taught on apprenticeship programmes.
- Work on the latest versions of the Self-assessment Report and the Quality Improvement Plan was ongoing.
- It was noted that the university had not been selected for the next round of Education and Skills Funding agency audits.

- Appropriate teams and individuals across the university were undertaking training on the Ofsted inspection framework. It was noted that the university was aiming for an 'Outstanding' outcome at its next inspection.

v. Academic Board

The unconfirmed minutes of the 11 December 2024 and 29 January 2025 meetings of the Academic Board were included at items 101 and 102 respectively. It was felt that the 29 January meeting, which had focussed on the merger of two of the university's faculties, had been positive and had reached an outcome that represented the feeling amongst Academic Board members.

RESOLVED:

That the updates be noted.

96 Secretary's Report

The Registrar (Academic) and Secretary to the Board introduced a report [96] concerning a number of governance-related items that had been considered and approved by the Audit and Risk Committee. These included:

- the revised constitution of the Audit and Risk Committee for the 2023/24 academic year; and
- the results of the effectiveness self-assessment survey of the Audit and Risk Committee.

RESOLVED:

- That the constitution of the Audit and Risk Committee be endorsed.
- That results of the effectiveness self-assessment survey of the Audit and Risk Committee be noted.

97 Student Complaints Annual Report 2023/24

RESOLVED:

That the report [97] be noted.

98 Strategic portfolio overview dashboard

RESOLVED:

That the dashboard [98] be noted.

99 Unconfirmed minutes of the 23 January 2025 meeting of the People and Culture Committee

RESOLVED:

That the unconfirmed minutes [99] be noted.

100 Student experience update

RESOLVED:

That the report [100] be noted.

101 Unconfirmed minutes of the 11 December 2024 meeting of the Academic Board

RESOLVED:

That the unconfirmed minutes [101] be noted.

102 Unconfirmed minutes of the 29 January 2025 extraordinary meeting of the Academic Board

RESOLVED:

That the unconfirmed minutes [102] be noted.

103 University Conferments Committee report

RESOLVED:

That the report [103] be noted.

104 Items placed under the university seal

RESOLVED:

That the report [104] be noted.

105 TNE partnership proposal: Al Rayyan International University, Qatar due diligence

RESOLVED:

That the due diligence [105] be noted.

106 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.

107 Date of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Board of Governors would take place at 10:00 on Thursday 15 May 2025 in The Yard, rooms 3.05 and 3.06.

108 Any other business

No items were raised.

Meeting duration: 10:00-15:03