

BOARD OF GOVERNORS MEETING

Minutes of the Board of Governors meeting held on Wednesday 27 March 2024 from 4pm to 7pm.

Present

Andrew Summers (Chair)
Richard Bee (Independent)
Andy Cook (Vice-Chancellor)
Esther Gbogboade (Acting President of Student Union)
Dr Penny Haughan (Co-opted)
Dr Markos Koumaditis (Independent)
Paul O’Grady (Independent)
Alberto Villanueva (Academic Staff Member)
Lee Wilkinson (Independent)
Noeline Sanders (Independent)

In attendance

Christopher Costigan – University Secretary and Director of Strategic Delivery
Tony Croudass – Director of IT
Karen Ingram – Director of People and Culture
Dan Janowski – Head of Strategic Recruitment Partnerships (items 7.1-7.3 only)
Lawrence Lartey – Director of Innovation, Industry and Enterprise
Andy Rees – Dean
Professor Simon Robertshaw – Deputy Vice-Chancellor
Emma Shailer – Chief Operating Officer
Yajna Sooklall – Interim Finance Director

Apologies

Shoku Amirani (Independent)
Professor Lizbeth Goodman (Co-opted)
Kate Gregory (Independent)
Professor Lisa Stansbie (Co-opted)
Chiz Nwaosu (Professional Services Staff Member)
Stephen Woodford (Independent)

	CHAIR'S WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS
24/01	The Chair welcomed members to the meeting. Apologies were received from Shoku Amirani, Professor Lizbeth Goodman, Kate Gregory, Chiz Nwaosu, Professor Lisa Stansbie and Stephen Woodford. A particular welcome was extended to Yajna Sooklall, the Interim Director of Finance.
	DEEP DIVE
24/02	The Board noted the discussion with international students, who had become an important part of the Ravensbourne University of London community. It was noted that only three students had participated, but the Board noted it had still been valuable to talk to students about their experience.
24/03	<p>The Board reflected on the meetings and drew out the following highlights from the discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why had students chosen Ravensbourne? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Students articulated the desire to broaden their career skills, particularly wanting to learn business concepts in the context of the creative economy. ○ London as a location was a key draw for all students, and for one student from the US, London offered a cheaper alternative to domestic US fees. ○ A desire for smaller classes and a more personal approach was outlined, which had been noted during the applicant journey with one student receiving a personal tour of the building. • What was the student experience so far? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Positively, students noted the opportunities to network (although not every student was taking advantage of this); the module content, which was closely connected to the student's career ambitions and interests; the opportunity for collaboration across courses; the clarity of expectation; and the location, including the O2 as a social space for students. ○ For development, students noted there was noise bleed between classrooms and felt there may be further opportunities for cross-course collaboration. ○ Overall, all the students had been very positive about their time so far at Ravensbourne. • How might the University improve? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Students suggested a range of areas for development including: the use of external speakers/TED talks, particularly for the new portfolio areas; the support offered during the applicant journey regarding student visas; ensuring information regarding student events and societies was easy to obtain; ensuring the curriculum is internationalised and that tutors do not take for granted that students understood the English context.
24/04	The Chair expressed his thanks to the students for their participation and to the Acting Student Union President for her support in arranging the meeting.
	DECLARATION OF INTERESTS
24/05	Members were reminded to declare any interests, personal or financial, that might relate to the business shown on the agenda for the meeting. No additional declarations were made.
	MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING
24/06	The minutes of the Board of Governors meeting held on 15 November 2023 were approved. Only one action was noted, which was not yet due.

CHAIR'S UPDATE	
24/07	The Chair updated the Board on recent policy developments, including a recent letter from the Chair of the OfS regarding harassment of Jewish students. It was further noted that the minister for higher education had resigned and a new minister, Luke Hall, had been appointed. Finally, the negative rhetoric towards international students and franchise students was noted.
24/08	In relation to the university's strategy, the Chair informed the Board that work with MTM was now underway. The Chair thanked the governors for their participation so far. MTM were now undertaking deep dives into various opportunities [REDACTED]
24/09	The Chair updated the Board on the recruitment process for the Deputy Chair which had taken place earlier in the day. Five candidates had been seen and one had been identified as a suitable potential Deputy Chair. Further conversations were needed prior to an offer of appointment. It was noted that the interviews for the vacant governor role were now scheduled for May 24.
24/10	The Chair informed the Board that the Governance and Nominations Committee had recommended that both Chiz Nwaosu and Alberto Villanueva be reappointed for further two-year terms. The Board approved the appointments.
VC REPORT	
24/11	Before introducing his report, the Vice-Chancellor welcomed the Board to R3, which had opened in January. The Vice-Chancellor noted that since the last meeting the University had four new intakes of students in November 23, December 23, January 24 and February 24 and had onboarded two new franchise partnerships. The collective effort of the University was acknowledged.
24/12	In relation to the University's finances, the Interim Director of Finance noted that Ravensbourne continued to grow. [REDACTED] It was noted that the finance team were now approaching the creation of monthly management information in a different way, which should make forecasting more accurate. It was noted the improvement in the year-end position had been achieved through income diversification efforts over the last two years and showed Ravensbourne was bucking the trend of the higher education sector by growing student applications, income, and financial sustainability.
24/13	In discussion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the Chair of the Finance Committee welcomed the new approach to reporting, which provided more accuracy. The Chair of the People and Culture Committee identified a high expenditure on agency costs. It was noted this was largely due to backfilling vacant posts whilst recruitment to the permanent post was underway.
24/14	The Vice-Chancellor introduced his report. In particular, it was noted that risk management had been a core feature of activity since the last meeting. It was specifically reported that the franchise arrangement with Oxford Business College had now been terminated. It was noted that Ravensbourne had not had an intake of students with OBC since May 23. The team were now managing the teach out of students.
24/15	The Vice-Chancellor further informed the Board that the executive remained vigilant over UKVI compliance and had commissioned an external audit from a specialist law firm to review the University's position. [REDACTED]
24/16	In discussion, the following points were noted: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [REDACTED]
24/17	The Vice-Chancellor informed the Board that Ravensbourne's undergraduate applications were up [REDACTED]. Ravensbourne had now achieved more undergraduate applications than ever in its history and the hard work of all teams was acknowledged. However, it was noted the competition for students would now be intense and so conversion was critical. In discussion it was noted that much of this growth came from new courses, but some existing courses (e.g. graphic design) had also seen a resurgence.
24/18	The Vice-Chancellor informed the Board of the positive outcomes from Semester 1. In particular, the level of assessment submission was significantly higher than in the past and was coupled with high pass rates of 86%. These figures would improve as students went through the resit period. It was noted this would have a positive impact on retention and the Vice-Chancellor thanked the academic leadership for their hard work in this area.
24/19	Finally, the Vice-Chancellor welcomed the results of the staff pulse survey, which had seen improved scores in every area.
	STAFF SURVEY
24/20	<p>The Director of People and Culture introduced the results of the staff survey, in particular drawing out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This was the first survey since 2019. • Areas of particular strength included that staff felt valued by students; that the University had fostered a diverse and inclusive work environment; and that staff were satisfied by the support they received from their managers. • Areas which performed less well included communication; and that only 61% of staff felt valued by the university. • Areas which had seen the largest swing since the previous survey included those reporting they were comfortable about sharing ideas with management; those feeling the University fostered a diverse and inclusive work environment; and the feeling of being valued by students. • Those who would speak highly of Ravensbourne as an employer had increased by 14%. • Actions to support further improvement included: rolling our leadership and management training; the roll out of the academic workload allocation model; investing in 80 new posts across both academia and professional services; looking to recruit on the basis of projections, rather than on receipt of income; a new Head of Communications and Content to support with staff communications; and EDI initiatives, including inclusivity training and reverse mentoring programmes.
24/21	<p>In discussion, the Board noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That only 38% of staff had responded, so caution was needed in how far the survey results represented the entire staff voice. A figure of at least 50% would make the results more credible. It was noted that communication, which was a low scoring area in the survey, may have been a factor in the turnout. • The need regularly to hear the staff voice and the possibility of undertaking thematic pulse surveys at regular intervals throughout the year. • That the University had evolved considerably over the past two years and there was now a different and positive dynamic amongst staff.
	FRANCHISE BUSINESS CASES
24/22	The Head of Strategic Recruitment Partnerships entered the meeting to present the business cases.
24/23	The Head noted the development of an operational model for Ravensbourne's franchise

	business which included new staff to support franchise provision. It was further noted that the policy environment in this area was negative and needed to be kept under review.
24/24	[REDACTED]
24/25	[REDACTED]
24/26	[REDACTED]
24/27	Finally, the Head set out the cumulative total number assumptions [REDACTED]
24/28	<p>In discussion, the Board noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were currently 5,000 on campus students and through the strategy exercise the target for the next five years would be set. This highlighted the importance of ensuring the Ravensbourne brand was not distorted by this activity, although a roughly 50/50 split of on campus and off campus was felt to be at an appropriate level. • The strategy to have a small number of high-quality partners, which had now been achieved and a period of consolidation to embed the partners and processes was now envisaged. • The opportunity to grow the Ravensbourne brand in new markets through international franchise. • That under these new partnerships there was a broader portfolio of courses being franchised, including in more creative areas. • If a relationship ended, both parties were contractually obliged to support students during the teach out period. If a partner went bust, the University would need to support students either by delivering the course directly or working with other partners to support students to continue in study. • The need to ensure that all students received a comparable experience, as both on and off campus students were Ravensbourne students. • The need to be alert to the fact that some partners were seeking OfS registration and ultimately TDAP, which would mean they would naturally move away from Ravensbourne. • [REDACTED] • The importance of ensuring that partners were spending an appropriate amount on the student experience. • That the University was currently recruiting additional people to multiple posts to ensure it had the capacity and capability to manage these relationships appropriately. • [REDACTED] <p>ACTION: bring a breakdown of partner expenditure on the student experience to a future Finance Committee meeting.</p> <p>ACTION: consider the termination clauses for Trent with regards to China.</p>
24/29	The Chair of the Board noted they had met with each of the partners owners and was encouraged by their approach, attitude and long-term interests in the organisations. However, not all due diligence was yet complete and this would be important prior to contract. The Chair of the Finance Committee noted that the opportunities had also been scrutinized by the Finance Committee and had been recommended to move forward to the Board.
24/30	Finally, the Vice-Chancellor noted that if the proposals were approved, there would then be a period of consolidation and bedding in and it was not anticipated to bring any new domestic opportunities forward soon.
24/31	Following the discussion, the Board approved the proposals to progress to contract, subject to completed and satisfactory due diligence.

24/32	The Head of Strategic Recruitment Partnerships left the meeting.
	NOMINATIONS AGREEMENT
24/33	The COO introduced a proposal to enter into a nominations agreement with a London student accommodation provider. The COO informed the Board that as Ravensbourne did not have its own accommodation, one of the ways in which it supported students who had housing needs was by entering into 'nominations agreements'. Under these agreements the University had first rights over a number of rooms in a student accommodation provider, on the proviso that if the room was not filled or the student did not pay, that the University would act as a guarantor of last resort. However, it was noted that students do normally also have a first guarantor.
24/34	This proposal was for a nominations agreement for 88 affordable rooms and a further 38 optional rooms [REDACTED]
24/35	The contract was originally for five years and so under the Scheme of Delegation required Board approval; but it had now been agreed on an annual rolling basis. However, although the liability of the University was capped it was also above the threshold for needing Board approval. Finally, it was noted the contract was still in draft, but it was expected that the final version would mirror that presented.
24/36	The Board requested that a paper be sent to a future Finance Committee on a student accommodation strategy. ACTION – draft a paper on the University’s student accommodation strategy for the Finance Committee.
24/37	The Board approved the nominations agreement.
	STUDENT EXPERIENCE / ACADEMIC ASSURANCE
24/38	The Dean and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor presented a paper to provide assurance to the Board on the University’s academic governance arrangements. The agenda item was underpinned by a range of documents including the Annual Quality and Standards Report, FE Self-Assessment Report, Degree Outcomes Statement, TRAC Return and Value for Money Statement.
24/39	Key points were drawn out from the papers, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the University had assessed that it had met all OfS B conditions with external recognition through TEF silver award. • that significant improvements had been made across hygiene areas of practice, including assessment, student voice, academic support and consistency of practice. • degree outcomes were moving to align with national averages. • the self-evaluation of further education and apprenticeships as good. • that external examiners had noted many areas of strength including strong student outcomes, a high quality of work, good quality of assessment and feedback and staff commitment and professionalism. • that students with partners at both Morley College and City and Guilds of London Art School had consistently strong outcomes.
24/40	In relation to the impact the University’s activity was having, the Dean and Deputy Vice-Chancellor drew out the: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improved 23/24 semester student achievement. • reduction in student withdrawals. • significant growth in student numbers. • effective introduction of the CAF, which now included a work-based learning

	<p>experience for all level 5 students, which would commence soon.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • positive engagement from staff in development opportunities and additionally the positive staff satisfaction. • improvement in the NSS score year on year by 7%. • positive Postgraduate Taught Education Survey results which placed Ravensbourne second out of 101 universities for teaching and 29th overall. • development of new learning environments (i.e. R3 and the VLE) which had been welcomed by the learning community; and the ongoing development of the Centre for Excellence in Emerging Technologies.
24/41	<p>The Dean and Deputy Vice-Chancellor went on to identify priority areas for development, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the engagement and retention of students. • the onboarding experience for international students. • the development of a new campus community, following the acquisition of R3. • access to and use of data and analytics to underpin the student experience and decision making. • The identification of priority areas for the new Access and Participation Plan, which was currently being drafted. • academic staff development, including progression and engagement in KE and research activity. • ensuring that students felt heard and were satisfied with their University experience at Ravensbourne. • student access to key learning resources; and the development of student learning and social environment(s). • engagement with franchise partners to ensure they were supported and were performing at appropriate levels. • Developing partnerships with industry and connecting into the professional life and practice modules which were developed as part of the CAF.
24/42	<p>In discussion, the following points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The underpinning support from all professional services areas and how key that was to student success. • That changes had been made several years ago with an understanding they would take, potentially, years to have impact, and how positive it was to see those efforts now bearing fruit. • That a great deal of work had been achieved and that academic staff were on board and welcomed the challenge. • That through the education strategy further work would be done on cross-course collaboration, noting the CEET as one example of a central space for interdisciplinary learning and collaboration. • That whilst good work had been done to ensure comparability of good degrees with the sector, this could fluctuate. It was further noted that outcomes by characteristic were also being looked at to ensure all students succeeded. • That the department of industry, innovation and enterprise was currently looking at ways to collaborate and support academia to deliver an excellent student experience.
24/43	<p>The Vice-Chancellor thanked the academic leadership for their efforts over the past few years and echoed the comments of how positive it was to see the impact of earlier work now coming through.</p>
24/44	<p>The Board considered and approved that they were assured that academic governance arrangements were effective, and quality and standards were being maintained.</p>
	<p>GOVERNANCE</p>
24/45	<p>The Chair introduced the outcomes from the AdvanceHE board effectiveness review. Overall, it was noted the report had given a positive review of board effectiveness at Ravensbourne.</p>

	Several recommendations and suggestions had been made which had been considered by the Steering Group and by the Governance and Nominations Committee. Most had been identified to take forward, although a few less urgent suggestions would be fully considered in due course.
24/46	The Board approved the action plan.
24/47	The Chair introduced the proposed Board calendar for 24/25. It was noted that the July meeting had been moved forward to June to support holidays over the summer months.
24/48	The Board approved the calendar.
	SUMMARY OF COMMITTEES
24/49	The Board noted the summary of committees.
	REGULATORY MATTERS
24/50	The Gender Pay Gap report was noted. It was confirmed that this had been scrutinised at the People and Culture Committee.
24/51	The Prevent Return and confirmation of acceptance from the OfS were noted.
	DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS
24/52	The Chair noted next meeting was the Strategy Away Day on 8 May 2024. A location had yet to be secured. It was further noted that for the first time there was a summer graduation, to be held the day after the Strategy Day, on 9 May 2024.
24/53	The date of the next formal Board meeting was 31 July 2024 4pm-7pm at Ravensbourne University London.