



St Mary's
University
Twickenham
London

**Minutes
Board of Governors
24 January 2024
The meeting was held in the Waldegrave Drawing Room**

Present:

- Mr Ben Andradi
- Mr Paul Barber
- Ms Caitlin Finn – Student Life President
- Dr Mary Mihovilovic
- Rt Rev Richard Moth (Chair)
- Ms Adeola Oke
- Professor Dominic Tildesley
- Ms Deborah Streatfield
- Ms Claire McDonnell (Vice-Chair)
- Mr Esteban Jurado Traverso
- Dr Ann York
- Mr Anthony McClaran - Vice-Chancellor
- Mrs Laura Bryde

In Attendance:

- Professor Mike Bewick – Interim Dean of the Faculty of Medicine
- Ms Elizabeth Bell – interim University Secretary and Director of Strategic Planning
- Mrs Jo Blunden – Chief Operating Officer (“COO”)
- Mr Neil Carleton – Project Manager (Faculty of Medicine)
- Professor Symeon Dagkas – Provost
- Mr Tim Emmett – Business Development Director
- Mr Richard Solomon – Chief Financial Officer (“CFO”)
- Ms Kristen Pilbrow – Director of International Engagement, Student Recruitment and Admissions
- Mr James Turnbull – CEO SMSU
- Ms Cynthia Kinduelo – Governance Officer (note taker)

Apologies:

- Dr Fiona Gatty
- Mr David Brambell

23/46 - Welcome and apologies for absence

The meeting opened with a prayer.

Apologies for absence had been received from Fiona Gatty and David Brambell.

23/47 - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

23/48 - PRESENTATION FROM THE DIRECTOR OF ESTATES AND CAMPUS SERVICES

The Director of Estates and Campus Services presented a series of Academic Estate development options that had been considered by the University. Members noted that the recommendation being made was to develop R block. This space was currently not of a good standard and had limited use. The refurbishment would make a dramatic improvement to this part of the main campus and would likely enhance the overall look and feel of the campus making it much more attractive to students.

It was noted that the current room sizes and configuration of spaces limited significant expansion on campus. As the university seeks to grow in new areas such as Allied Health, Computer Science and other associated areas there is a need to develop more functional spaces to meet these needs. The launch of a Medical School in 2026 would also require additional space with specific requirements. Details of how the Medical School would be accommodated on the campus would need to be outlined in the next stage of information provided to the GMC.

Members noted a concern that the proposed redevelopment of R Block to house the Medical School was a temporary solution and would not support the planned growth in student numbers in the medium term. It would therefore be important to ensure that the medium-term plan was also being developed in parallel to satisfy the GMC requirements and to meet future growth outlined in the Medical School plan. The interim Dean of Medicine noted that, based on the reported experience at other Universities, the GMC would likely accept a plan which was in two phases.

The likely short-term disruption for staff located in and around R block was acknowledged and it was noted that clear communication with affected staff would be important. It would also be important to ensure that the new space was available for wider use and collaborative programme delivery to ensure that the Medical School was embedded within the University.

Members noted that in committing to the R block development there would be other areas of the University with new space requirements that were not being prioritised, e.g. Business & Law. It would be important to ensure that the communications around the decision were clear and outlined the rationale for this investment.

The board **noted** the presentation & approved the recommendation made to progress with developing R Block.

Action:

The Board to receive information about the potential options for phase 2 of the Medical School

23/49 - CHAIR'S BUSINESS

The Chair reminded members that the Board Away day would be taking place on the 14 March 2024 at The Lensbury. The agenda would focus on recruitment and retention, the regulatory environment, financial options for the future and plans for the 175th Anniversary celebrations.

A meeting of the Nominations Committee had taken place to review progress on implementing the recommendations from the Governance Review. Good progress had been made and a fuller report would come to the next meeting

23/50 - MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of 22 November 2023 were approved subject to the following amendment:

23/35 - The employer contribution would be rising by 5 percentage points and not 5% as stated in the minutes. The University Secretary agreed to amend the minutes.

23/51 - MATTERS ARISING

23/33 – The COO provided an updated staff turnover figure of 18.48% which was below the KPI target.

23/34 The Provost reported that he had spoken to his team about the possibility of extending the hardship funding to Postgraduate students, but this was not possible due to the restrictions placed on the funding by the OfS.

23/52 - VICE-CHANCELLOR'S REPORT

The Vice-Chancellor presented his report to the Board. He reported that the current operating environment for universities was extremely challenging. Several universities were reportedly in financial difficulties with a number seeking to reduce costs through redundancy schemes. A recent PwC report¹ had highlighted the scale of the financial challenges facing the sector. Whilst St Mary's was not immune to these challenges it was in a stable financial position. There was, however, no room for complacency as the outlook for the sector was showing no signs of improvement. Given the fast-moving policy environment it was proposed that a policy briefing would be brought to each Board meeting. This would ensure that Board members are given sufficient insight to developments and the potential impact on the University.

Members heard that planning for the 175th Anniversary in 2025 was well underway. There would be opportunities for Board members to provide feedback and input at the away day in March.

Members noted the various sports news and successes outlined in item 7 of the report and felt that there was potential to make more of the University's sporting links. This might require specialist expertise not currently available in-house but there was potential to explore opportunities.

¹ <https://www.pwc.co.uk/industries/government-public-sector/education/financial-sustainability-of-uk-higher-education-sector.html>

The Vice-Chancellor reported on his recent visit to Rome to attend a celebratory conference to mark the centenary of the International Federation of Catholic Universities in Rome. During the event there was a Papal address which Board members might like to see. It was agreed that this would be shared with the minutes.

The Board **noted** the Vice-Chancellor's Report.

Action:

- the University Secretary would add a Policy Update as a standing agenda item for future Board meetings
- The University Secretary would circulate the link to the PwC report with the minutes
- The University Secretary would share the Papal address from the ICFU celebration with Board members.
- The COO and Provost would liaise with Claire McDonnell about possible sporting links

23/53 - **FACULTY OF MEDICINE UPDATE**

The interim Dean of the Medical School presented an update on progress made on the University's application to the GMC. He reported that the University was on track to meet the deadline of 29 February 2024. There were ten areas which the GMC had requested additional information in. Key to this would be the firming up of plans in relation to the Estate and the initiation of the recruitment process for the permanent Dean of the Medical School. Members were supportive of the move to appoint a permanent Dean.

Members heard that one of the most challenging aspects of creating the Medical School would be in securing sufficient student placements. In the light of this the project team had identified some innovative approaches to securing placements which would likely satisfy GMC requirements but also enhance the student experience.

Following the submission of the information to the GMC it was likely that a decision would be received within 6 weeks about whether to proceed with the University's application.

Members noted that it would be important to ensure that recruitment and marketing activities were initiated as soon as possible to ensure that there was a viable intake in September 2026.

The Board **noted** the report and endorsed the recommendation to proceed with recruitment of the permanent Dean of Medical School.

23/54 - **STUDENT RECRUITMENT UPDATE**

The Director of International Engagement, Student Recruitment and Admissions, presented updated figures on student recruitment. She noted that the challenges for both domestic and international recruitment had remained in this cycle. Since 2016 the University had seen an upwards trajectory on international student

recruitment. This had been dampened in recent years due to changes in government policy which were affecting the entire sector.

In terms of domestic recruitment there had been changes to the key UCAS deadline date which made it difficult to make year-on-year comparisons. The current figures were showing a 12% decrease in undergraduate applications, however, there was also a 29% increase in firm accepts. She noted that the data was still in a state of flux because of the proximity to the application deadline but indicated that past data trends suggested that the final position would be broadly in line with the previous year. Members heard that an enhanced conversion strategy had been developed and that an external consultant had been engaged to drive up conversion activity for key programmes.

Members highlighted the importance of using data to drive activity and asked whether the University was using data to inform recruitment activities and strategies. They heard that there was extensive use of the data available through a suite of PowerBI reports. The data on international students enabled the team to segment the market and ensure that communications and activity was country specific.

The Board **noted** the Student Recruitment update

23/55 - **INTERNATIONAL CAMPUS PROPOSAL**

The Provost presented a paper which outlined the University's intention to further explore an opportunity to open a campus in Dubai.

The VC and Provost had visited Dubai and met with key stakeholders. The KHDA had signalled that it would welcome the establishment of a St Mary's campus in Dubai and was keen to demonstrate its commitment to working with a Catholic University.

The Board noted the various financial and operational risks associated with the proposal and noted that these would be explored further in a full business case. There were also reputational risks that the University needed to consider further as part of the business case development.

The Board **noted** the paper and agreed that the University should explore the proposal further. A business case would be presented to the Board for approval in due course.

23/56 - **LONG-TERM STRATEGIC OPTIONS**

The CFO presented a paper which outlined three financial scenarios which were considered by SLT in preparation for the annual planning round. It was noted that all three scenarios modelled would be compatible with the University's need to borrow £8-10m to fund a major new build. SLT had indicated that scenario C would be the recommended option as it presented a more balanced approach to future growth. This paper had been considered by FRC at its January meeting and members of FRC had also endorsed scenario C.

The Board **endorsed** the recommendation to proceed with Scenario C as a planning parameter for the forthcoming planning round

23/57 - VISION 2030 UPDATE

The interim University Secretary and Director of Strategic Planning presented year end retention figures for the 2022/23 academic year. She reported that in-year data had consistently shown an improvement of between 2 and 3 percentage points. However, the final position had not turned out to be as positive as anticipated with an improvement of 1 percentage point overall. Whilst the University was pleased to see a small improvement, there was a need to see more significant improvements given the risk in relation to the OfS's *B3 Conditions of Registration* metric in relation to this.

It was noted that this item would be discussed further during the Board of Governors Away day.

23/58 - SU REPORT

The Student Life President presented SU report. She noted the University's varsity game against Brunel has been confirmed for 22 March 2024.

23/59 - MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS

The Financial Controller presented the Management Accounts for Period 3 ending 31 October 2023.

The Board **noted** the Management Accounts.

23/60 - ACADEMIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE TOR

The interim University Secretary presented the Terms of Reference for Academic Scrutiny Committee which were approved at the meeting held on 06 December 2023.

The Board **approved** the Academic Scrutiny Committee Terms of Reference.

23/61 - ANNUAL REPORT OF REMUNERATION COMMITTEE

The interim University Secretary presented the annual report of the Remuneration Committee which the University was required to publish annually.

The Board **approved** the report.

23/62 - FINANCE AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

The Finance & Resources Committee minutes of the 15 January 2023 were approved by the Board.

23/63 - ACADEMIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Academic Scrutiny Committee minutes of the 6 December 2023 were approved by the Board.

23/64 - AUDIT & RISK COMMITTEE

The Audit & Risk Committee minutes of the 15 November 2023 were approved by the Board.

23/65 - **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The interim University Secretary reported that a complaint had been made to the Charity Commission in 2020 in relation to an ongoing dispute with a small number of students over accommodation fees. In October 2023 one case was settled with no admission to liability on a commercial basis. As a result of this settlement a further complaint has been made to the Charity Commission. The letter from the Charity Commission and the University's response was presented to the Board. The Board **noted** the response.

The interim University Secretary reported that most Universities had sought exemption from the Charity Commission and the Charity Commission had itself recommended that the University should seek exemption. recommended that St Mary's should also seek exemption. The Board **agreed** that Charity Commission exemption should be pursued.

23/66 - **DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS**

14 March 2024 (Away Day)

25 April 2024

19 June 2024

END