



St Mary's
University
Twickenham
London

**Minutes
Board of Governors
25 April 2024**

The meeting was held in the Waldegrave Drawing Room

Present:

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
Dr Fiona Gatty
Mr David Brambell

In Attendance:

Professor Mike Bewick – Interim Dean of the Faculty of Medicine
Ms Elizabeth Bell – University Secretary and Director of Strategic Planning
Mrs Jo Blunden – Chief Operating Officer (“COO”)
Professor Symeon Dagkas – Provost
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:

Mr Ben Andradi

Ref No.

23/67 **WELCOME & APOLOGIES**

The Chair welcomed members of the Board to the meeting and opened with a prayer.

Apologies had been received from Ben Andradi.

23/68 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest

23/69 **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2024 were approved by the Committee.

23/70 **MATTERS ARISING**

There were no matters arising.

23/71 **PRESENTATION FROM THE HEAD OF EMPLOYABILITY SERVICES**

The Head of Employability Services provided a brief overview of Employability Services. The service provides access for all students (and lifetime access for graduates) to career guidance, information and advice, in person and remotely. The Service also runs a suite of work-based learning modules which are offered across a significant proportion of the Undergraduate programme portfolio.

The Head of Employability Services had recently led the development of the Graduate Outcome Strategy 2024 which focuses on three pillars:

- Integrated by design (delivering employability through curriculum)
- External Engagement (working with employers and partners)
- Employability Services (supporting students and academics)

Members of the Board commended the Head of Employability Services for the work that has been done to improve outcomes for St Mary's graduates.

Action: Liz Bell to distribute the presentation to all Board Members

23/71 **VICE-CHANCELLOR'S REPORT**

The Vice-Chancellor presented his report to the Board. He reported that the Spring Graduations had been particularly notable this year as the University had hosted over 350 alumni who had been given an honorary Bachelor of Education degree. These awards were offered to St Mary's College students who, at the time, graduated with a Certificate in Education. In total over 700 former students had accepted the honorary award.

Members of the Board **noted** the Vice-Chancellor's Report.

23/72 **POLICY UPDATE**

The Vice Chancellor presented a policy update to the Board. Members heard that the sector was awaiting the publication of the Migration Advisory Committee's (MAC) review of the graduate visa route. The sector had seen a significant reduction in the volume of applications from international students in part due to the uncertainty over the future of the post-study work route. The MAC report's recommendation was expected to influence the pattern of international student applications through the remainder of the recruitment cycle

Members heard that the new Free Speech duties for Universities would take effect from 1 August 2024. This would include the launch of a new OfS complaints scheme which will allow students, staff and visiting speakers to complain about restrictions on their lawful free speech at the University or Students' Union. The University is updating its code of practice in relation to Freedom of Speech and reviewing current complaints procedures to ensure that these are compliant with the new requirements.

Members of the Board **noted** the report.

23/73 **STUDENT RECRUITMENT UPDATE**

The Director of International Engagement, Student Recruitment and Admissions (IESRA) present provided an update on the current student recruitment position. She noted that applications for September 2024 entry continued to track behind the previous year. The position on firm accepts was more difficult to compare at this time due to the timing of Easter. Further work was being done to try and drive an increase in conversion rates to maximise the applications currently in the system.

Members noted the overall increase in the number of PGCE applications and acceptances. The Director of IESRA noted that there had been a significant increase in international applications which was driven by availability of government bursaries. It was unlikely that all these students would convert but University was expecting to see an overall increase in international PGCE students in 2024/25.

The Director of IESRA reiterated the point made by the Vice-Chancellor about the importance of the MAC review in shaping the student recruitment position for September. Further work was also being done to refine the commission model for agents in order to ensure that the incentive model on offer was effective.

Members of the Board **noted** the report.

23/74 **RETENTION UPDATE**

The Director of Strategic Planning provides a brief overview of the in-year retention metrics as at 14th April 2024. She noted that for Year 1 Undergraduate students attrition is currently 3 percentage points worse than at the same point in 2022/23. This worsening position was primarily due to increased attrition rates across partner institutions.

Members of the Board noted that it was pleasing to see improvements in retention for the Faculty of Business and Law which had historically seen relatively high levels of attrition. The Provost reported that this improvement was likely linked to the establishment of dedicated staff resource in the Faculty focused on identifying students at risk of withdrawing and supporting them to remain at St Mary's. The Board noted that it would be beneficial to share some of this good practice with partner institutions.

Members of the Board **noted** the retention update.

23/75 **MEDICAL SCHOOL UPDATE**

The interim Dean of the Medical School reported that the resubmission to the GMC had been made by 18th March. The additional information provided to the GMC would now be considered by the staff who had been allocated to St Mary's application. No further information had been provided about the likely timeline for a decision from the GMC.

The Board heard that the University had begun the process for the recruitment of the Founding Dean. The job description and role specification had been agreed and a recruitment firm had been appointed to conduct the search.

Members of the Board **noted** Medical School update.

23/76 **MEDICAL CURRICULUM APPROVAL**

The Founding Dean of the Medical School presented a proposal to purchase the MBBS curriculum from the contingency school, The University of Central Lancashire (UCLan). The total cost of purchasing the curriculum would be £2m and the University would be responsible for the cost regardless of the final decision from the GMC.

The curriculum materials would be provided under a phased approach with the outline curriculum for all years to be provided upon signing the contract. The detailed curriculum for years one and two would also be provided upon signing the contract. The detailed curriculum for years three, four and five would be provided at a later date. in the academic year 2023/24. The £2m payment for the curriculum would also be phased with £700k being payable in July 2024, £650k in July 2025 and £600k in July 2026.

The Board **approved** the purchase of the curriculum but agreed that the contract should not be signed until the University had received the outcome of the resubmission to the GMC.

23/77 **MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS**

The CFO presented the Management Accounts for the 6 months ending 31 January 2024. He noted that the University is reporting a YTD operating profit/EBITDA of £1.2m which is c.£41k favourable to budget. However, he noted that there were some potential down-side risks emerging that may affect year end performance.

Members also heard that the January 2024 accounts reflect a capital gain of £1m on the disposal of 16 & 16A Strawberry Hill Road.

Members of the Board **noted** the Management Accounts.

23/78 **STUDENT UNION REPORT**

The Student Life President presented an update on activities within the Students' Union (SMSU). She reported that to date SMSU had raised £20,915.49 for various charities which meant that the full year target £20,000 had already been met.

The SMSU elections had taken place and there were a total of 13 candidates. The level of turnout exceeded the 25% target. The Board heard that the new Student Life President, David James would be joining the Board for the 2024/25 academic year.

The annual varsity event was held on 20th March at Brunel University and included more than 30 fixtures including the first ever Wheelchair Rugby Varsity fixture in the UK. St Mary's retained the Varsity trophy for the first time ever.

The Board commended SMSU on the work that had been done in supporting student retention.

The Board **noted** the report.

23/80 **STRAWBERRY HILL HOUSE**

The Vice Chancellor provides a brief overview of the current discussions being held between the University and Strawberry Hill House. Members heard that Strawberry Hill Trust (SHT) had initiated discussions about the potential for a closer collaboration in response to their increasingly difficult financial position. The University had outlined three options for further consideration and of these only Option B was considered to be viable by both St Mary's and SHT. Work was now underway to develop an outline proposal for consideration by both St Mary's and SHT. Further updates would be brought to the Board for discussion.

The Board **noted** the update.

23/81 **MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE FINANCE AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

The Finance and Resources Committee minutes of the 07 March 2024 were approved by the Board.

23/82 MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE

The Audit and Risk Committee minutes of the meeting held on 29 February 2024 were approved by the Board.

23/83 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There were no items of any other business.

23/84 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

19 June 2024