

Minutes of the hybrid meeting held on 21 March 2023 at 3.30pm

Present physically: C Higgins, Chair N Savvas, CEO (part)

Present virtually: C Chua R Hetherington, Co-opted

In attendance: E Lees, Executive Dean University Studies
F D'Costa, Registrar
L Hunt, Head of Student Success
R Lawson, observing as part of the External Board Review (part)
S Appleby, Director of HE Operations
S Gales, Governance Professional

Apologies:

Absent: J Gazzard, Vice Chair

Action

1. **Declaration of Interests and Apologies for absence**

C Higgins and N Savvas declared their roles as Trustees of Suffolk Academies Trust. C Chua declared his role as an employee of University of Cambridge's Judge Business School. No other conflicts of interest in relation to the items of the agenda were declared.

The Chair welcomed R Lawson to observe the meeting.

The absence of J Gazzard was noted.

N Savvas joined the meeting at 3.36pm

2. **Minutes of the Committee meeting held on 3 November 2022**

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2022 were **agreed** as an accurate record.

3. **Matters Arising from the meeting on 3 November 2022**

Three matters arising from the previous meeting were complete with two matters arising ongoing. S Gales informed that the College has been successful in an application to utilise the DfE's FE Governor Recruitment Service and so Peridot will be working with us to try to source additional Governors with HE expertise.

F D'Costa provided a verbal update on ongoing work to develop a survey to capture reasons applicants choose US or decide to study elsewhere.

4. **Risk Register Extract**

Governors received and considered an extract of the updated Risk Register which showed 0 Red risks, 2 Amber risks and 2 Yellow risks.

Governors discussed WSCR029 and queried why this risk has increased from yellow to amber. E Lees explained the rationale for changing the risk name and the causes for the increase of risk. E Lees and S Appleby confirmed the actions underway to mitigate the risks. Governors agreed this was appropriate.

Governors discussed WSCR003 and queried whether this was about target setting or in-year retention. E Lees confirmed WSCR003 is about in-year retention and WSCR060 is about accurate target setting. Governors asked C Shepherd to consider the wording of the risk name to clarify this.

Governors reviewed the risks and **felt assured** by the mitigations proposed.

C Shepherd

5. **HE Student Experience**

Governors received and considered the paper provided, and L Hunt summarised the report.

Governors discussed the role of Student President and Student Governor should be distinct as one is a student representative and one is not, and noted that the motivation for applying for each role is different. S Gales confirmed that we will re-advertise the HE Student Governor role after Easter to try to find a student who will benefit from the experience and role.

The Student President is the urgent role to elect for student feedback and representation, and Governors supported the idea that this should be a paid role.

Governors noted that student feedback is essential and queried the reasons for low uptake in Student Representatives and for Student Council roles. L Hunt noted that our cohort of students tend to have caring or work commitments and therefore do not feel able to take on additional roles beyond their studies. S Appleby and L Hunt explained the many student voice mechanisms used to collect student feedback. E Lees noted the higher/degree apprenticeship students are the least likely to provide direct feedback as feedback tends to come via their employers, and informed that the team are working to change this culture.

Governors noted the need to show we are listening, and the outcome of student voice and L Hunt explained the 'you said, we did' mechanism being used to promote this.

Governors discussed the ongoing NSS and queried if response rates are comparable to previous years. L Hunt confirmed that they are.

Governors commended the improved support offered to students.

Governors queried if we have a contract with students. E Lees informed that students agree to adhere the Student Charter and Student Code of Conduct, and that we agree to adhere to our General Terms and Conditions / Fees Policy and our Student Communication & Public Information Policy. E Lees to share these documents with the Committee.

E Lees

6. **Access and Participation Plan (APP)**

Governors received and considered the paper provided and E Lees summarised the report.

Governors commended the proposed utilisation of the APP to improve student recruitment and outcomes.

Governors noted some HE providers have updated their APP this year and queried why we had opted not to. E Lees explained the reasons for this, which were endorsed.

7. **Student Recruitment**

Governors received and considered the paper provided, and F D'Costa summarised the report.

Governors discussed the application data and queried what proportion of ECG sixth form provision students have applied to US courses. E Lees summarised the internal process for monitoring applications from ECG sixth form provision students and to promote US courses to these students. E Lees noted the team are working closely with marketing to promote US courses.

Governors noted that historically we have not achieved the target student numbers and queried how confident we are that the target for 2023/24 is realistic and achievable. E Lees answered this.

Governors discussed the financial impact of not achieving the target student numbers and queried how much strain this puts on the budget and whether the income for US is appropriate for the expenditure. C Higgins, as Chair of the Finance Committee, informed that not achieving the target student numbers caused significant strain on the budget and the Executive have worked to identify significant efficiencies, reported monthly to the Finance Committee to ensure we achieve a year-end financial surplus. One of the problems has been data for target/budget setting and a better database has now been obtained. E Lees informed that the team have been working to analyse the financial viability and contribution of US by course and level, to enable financial modelling to inform decision making. E Lees informed the Committee of the current contribution of US and the benchmark contribution, and outlined steps the team are taking to increase contribution – and the measures taken to improve admissions.

Governors commended the teams progress in improving data and modelling, recognising it will take a couple of years before the fruits of this work are seen.

Governors discussed the particular issues and challenges being encountered with the Counselling course were discussed at some length with Governors recognising the difficulties being faced and the efforts being made by the team to address them.

8. US Curriculum Strategy

Governors received and considered the paper provided, and E Lees summarised the report.

Governors commended the commitment to meetings the needs of local students.

9. OfS Compliance Review

F D'Costa informed that OfS have confirmed acceptance of our HESA data return and that we are OfS compliant.

F D'Costa informed that the team are undertaking an audit of our website and our information on the UCAS website to ensure compliance with the information required by the Competition and Markets Authority.

F D'Costa outlined how we are communicating with current and prospective students where courses may/will change to comply with our General Terms and Conditions / Fees Policy.

Governors queried how confident we are that we will be able to resolve issues in readiness for running the courses in 2023/24. E Lees answered this.

[R Lawson left the meeting at 4.57pm](#)

The Committee discussed the specific challenges relating to each course.

10. Any Other Business

- Review of the meeting

Governors commended the Executive for the quality of their reports and thanked them for detailed and open discussions.

- University of East Anglia (UEA)

The Committee discussed the recent news coverage and the contributing factors for this. The Committee noted they remain confident in UEA and fed back that relationships remain supportive and effective.

The meeting closed at 5.06pm