

Board of Directors Minutes

Meeting held on 11th December 2024 at 3pm
Teams online

Attended:

- Rob Cowan – Director, Chief Executive Officer
- Jules Brookes – Director, Managing Director / Head of Provider, Chair
- Anwar Hamad – Director, General Manager, Clerk
- Mulika Sannie – Non-Executive Director
- Peter Black – Non-Executive Finance Director
- Andrew Gower – Non-Executive Director
- Keith Harris – Non-Executive Director

MINUTES

Item
Section 1: Welcome
<p>1.1. <u>Welcome and apologies</u></p> <p>1.1.1. The Chair welcomed members to the meeting.</p> <p>1.2. <u>Confirmation of minutes from the previous meeting</u></p> <p>1.2.1. The board <u>confirmed</u> the minutes from the previous meeting.</p> <p>1.3. <u>Actions update</u></p> <p>1.3.1. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) provided an update on a recent meeting with the Head of Quality regarding the objective of securing research funding. To achieve this, the institution needs to establish five or six research projects in collaboration with businesses, though securing business commitment remains a challenge. It was noted that this initiative will not incur direct costs for the institution.</p> <p>1.3.2. A Non-Executive Director noted that while Knowledge Transfer (KT) projects may not fall under the category of pure academic research, they can be groundbreaking in the context of addressing strategic opportunities or specific needs within external organisations. The Head of Provider emphasised that this initiative should be viewed as part of a broader journey to strengthen academic capabilities, supporting the institution's long-term goal of attaining University Title.</p>
Section 2: Standing Items (to note unless starred)
<p>2.1. <u>Head of Provider's report</u></p> <p>2.1.1. The Head of Provider acknowledged the current climate of uncertainty in Higher Education (HE), noting a general sense of malaise within the UK HE</p>

sector. With the recent change in government, decisions on many proposed reforms (including those from the previous administration) have been delayed until August 2025. However, the new government has indicated that Lifelong Loan Entitlement (LLE) will continue to launch albeit delayed by one year.

- 2.1.2. The Head of Provider reaffirmed pride in being registered with the Office for Students (OfS) and the UK HE sector, emphasising the importance of maintaining a distinct and recognisable identity for the institution. Concerns were raised about the potential homogenisation of course offerings under LLE and the importance of ensuring the institution's unique value remains recognised.
- 2.1.3. It was reconfirmed that the OfS has paused all Degree Awarding Powers (DAP) applications except for a small number of institutions, including pointblank.
- 2.1.4. The report highlighted broader challenges, such as inflation, the rising cost of living, and increased scrutiny of value for money in HE. Media coverage has contributed to scepticism about the value of degrees. Despite these challenges, the institution performed well over the summer, albeit under the difficult circumstances of the new building not being operational.
- 2.1.5. In response to the current environment of the sector, the institution has adjusted its financial forecasts. A Non-Executive Director noted that current challenges can provide an opportunity to take stock and strategically plan for the future.
- 2.1.6. The Head of Provider also highlighted that the institution now employs around 160 staff members, which is a significant achievement and a milestone to be proud of.

2.2. Premises expansion update

- 2.2.1. The CEO shared that the new building successfully opened in September 2024, and while there are a few minor teething issues, these do not impact students' day-to-day experience. The equipment is fully operational, and the new Hub provides opportunities to host events and potentially revive the Live Sound Engineering courses previously offered by pointblank. The Hub also offers a space for student representatives to organise society activities. The School now has four SSL consoles, exceeding what most recording studios offer. The CEO noted that effective marketing of the new facility could lead to increased student recruitment. Student feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, though there is a desire to make the Hub more vibrant. A launch party for the building has been confirmed for April 3rd. **ACTION: The CEO to investigate the possibility of running Live Sound Engineering courses from the Hub.**

2.2.2. A Non-Executive Director praised the building, stating that it far surpassed his expectations and described it as a first-class facility. He noted that the CEO's vision of recreating the atmosphere of a professional recording studio has been successfully achieved.

2.2.3. The Head of Provider provided an update on plans for the Student Union, which was highlighted in another part of the report. With the enhanced space now available, there is greater potential to develop the union. The long-term goal includes appointing a sabbatical officer and securing an alcohol license for the facility.

2.3. Adopt the management accounts for the quarter ended 30/09/2024

2.3.1. The management accounts were presented with no comments from the Board, and they were formally adopted.

2.4. Degree Award Powers (DAPs) update

2.4.1. The Board was informed that the documentation for the DAP application, including the comprehensive book of evidence, was uploaded yesterday. The submission comprised approximately 33,000 words and 120 pieces of supporting evidence. The institution now awaits feedback from the OfS to initiate discussions on the scrutiny process.

2.4.2. The Non-Executive Finance Director enquired about Middlesex University's (MDX) role in the application process. The CEO clarified that MDX is expected to support the application, and no objections or pushback have been received to date.

2.4.3. The cost of the application process to date has been approximately £45,000.

Achieving Degree Awarding Powers will provide a more effective way to manage the institution's course provision.

2.5. Review report from Academic Board

2.5.1. A Non-Executive Director commended the introduction of departmental reviews, highlighting their value in enhancing the institution's quality assurance processes.

2.5.2. Regarding the Course Monitoring and Compliance (CMC) report, A Non-Executive Director noted general improvements in module performance. However, he emphasised the importance of cross-referencing these improvements with NSS scores related to module performance to ensure there is a holistic review of KPIs.

2.5.3. On the topic of Recognition of Prior Experience (RPE) as an alternative entry route, it was suggested that the institution explore whether it can implement this process effectively. A Non-Executive Director remarked that RPE criteria should remain broad to allow flexibility, while another Non-Executive Director viewed RPE as a significant opportunity. From an APP perspective, RPE could be perceived as a barrier to access unless well-implemented. A Non-Executive Director proposed asking students to create a record detailing the skills they bring and how they align with course requirements. **ACTION: The General Manager will discuss these points with the Head of Education and Curriculum.**

2.5.4. A Non-Executive Director concluded by praising the overall report, describing it as the best one produced to date.

2.5.5. No further comments were raised.

2.6. Review report from Executive Committee

2.6.1. It was recommended that future reports include a staff recruitment summary. **ACTION: The General Manager will include this in future reports.**

2.6.2. No further comments were raised.

Section 3: Items to Decide

3.1. Approve 2025 forecast

3.1.1. The forecast for 2025 was approved by the Board.

3.2. Tuition fee increase proposal

3.2.1. The proposal to increase tuition fees for new and current students, in line with the Government announcement from November 2024, was approved. This decision was made in consideration of the current financial uncertainty within the sector and the added value students will be receiving from the investment in the new premises.

Section 4: Items to Discuss

4.1. Discuss any recommendations from Audit and Value for Money Committee

4.1.1. The General Manager to update the Risk Register in accordance with the feedback provided in the meeting.

4.1.2. The General Manager to update the presentation of the budgets tables.

<p>4.1.3. The General Manager to discuss module feedback with the Head of Education and Curriculum.</p> <p>4.1.4. The Non-Executive Director to circulate the report from the internal auditors once it has been produced.</p>
Section 5: Items to Note
<p>5.1. <u>Students numbers report</u></p> <p>5.1.1. Student recruitment performance was discussed throughout the meeting, and no further comments were raised.</p>
Section 6: Close
<p>6.1. <u>Vote on Shareholders’ dividends</u></p> <p>6.1.1. The Board approved the issue of Shareholders’ dividends.</p> <p>6.2. <u>Confirmation of next meeting date</u></p> <p>6.2.1. The next Board of Directors meeting is scheduled to take place on Wednesday 26th March 2025.</p> <p>6.3. <u>AOB</u></p> <p>6.3.1. The Board commended the quality of the papers provided for the meeting and requested that their thanks be passed on to the relevant teams.</p>

Key Contacts

Chair: Jules Brookes
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Clerk: Anwar Hamad
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Actions Table

Action No.	Minute Ref.	Action	Deadline	Responsible Parties
1	2.2.1	The CEO to investigate the possibility of running Live Sound Engineering courses from the Hub.	Next meeting	CEO

2	2.5.3	The General Manager to discuss feedback on the Academic Board report with the Head of Education and Curriculum.	Next meeting	General Manager
3	2.6.1	The General Manager to include future staff recruitment summary in future EXCO reports.	Next meeting	General Manager