

NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY

**MINUTES OF THE VIRTUAL EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE
BOARD OF GOVERNORS
HELD ON 9 FEBRUARY 2021**

Present

Mr N Goulden, Pro-Chancellor (Chair)	Mrs L Holder
Ms A Brown	Mr G Love
Ms C Brown	Mr C Naughton
Mr D Dayal	Miss J Nelson
Mr S Denton	Professor E W Peck
Mr N Ebbs	Baroness D Warwick
Mr I Ellis	Ms C Wayman
Dr A Emuwa	Mr D Williams
Mrs S Fish	Mr O Woodley

In Attendance

Professor S Huttly, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic Development and Performance)
Professor N Wright, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Enterprise)
Mr J A Lacey, Director of Finance
Mrs R C Jenkyn, Clerk to the Board of Governors
Miss J A Clews, Governance Services Manager (Minute Secretary)
Mr M Kenyon, Co-opted Member - Audit and Risk Management Committee (Observer)

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Mr J Maier, Sir D Nicholson and Mrs S Walker-Smith.

21.01 Welcomes

The Pro-Chancellor welcomed members to this extraordinary meeting of the Board of Governors, convened virtually.

The Pandemic Advisory Group continued to meet regularly to support the Vice-Chancellor and senior colleagues, and the Pro-Chancellor thanked Ian Ellis, Geoff Love and Diana Warwick for their contributions to this Group.

The Pro-Chancellor thanked Governors for their feedback on the Anti-Racism and White Privilege development session held on 25 January 2021. The general consensus had been that a more in-depth session would have been welcomed, and opportunities to address this would be explored.

21.02 Declarations of Interests Relating to Items on the Agenda

Members present were asked to declare any potential conflicts of interest they held in the agenda items to be considered. No conflicts of interests were declared.

21.03 Covid-19 Response and Current Status

The Board received a report (Document A) from the University Executive Team in relation to the University's Covid-19 response and current status. The report provided a platform for discussion with Governors on five key topics.

[Some of the detail of this minute has been withdrawn due to its confidential nature.]

(a) Operational Implications

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic Development and Performance) and the Chief Operating Officer and Registrar presented the summary relating to operational matters. The following matters were highlighted during discussion:

- The University continued to develop scenario plans for a return to in-person, on-campus teaching during this academic year. In line with the latest Government guidance, the earliest date for this would be 8 March 2021, and details were awaited in relation to any specific arrangements, e.g. a staggered return. The University had made assumptions in this regard based on previous experience;
- The University Executive Team (UET) was working closely with academic schools to ensure that appropriate local plans were in place to manage students' learning and teaching and to support them to achieve their learning outcomes. The University was liaising with colleagues and the Trades Unions in relation to extending teaching beyond normal hours and term dates to deliver these plans, whilst being mindful of individuals' personal circumstances. This approach was welcomed by the Board;
- The President of Nottingham Trent Students' Union (NTSU) reported that feedback received from students had indicated they were keen to return to on-campus activity at the earliest opportunity. In particular, students were missing the extra-curricular activities and social aspects of being on campus;
- Students had raised the payment of residential accommodation rents where they were unable to return to campus as a result of the pandemic restrictions. The University had addressed this and extended the accommodation rent waiver granted for NTU and UPP accommodation until 7 March where students were not in residence. This approach would be reviewed again when further details were available from Government in relation to arrangements for a return to campus. It was noted that the University continued to encourage private providers in this regard and it was reported that some providers had been more flexible in their approach than in the previous academic year;
- It was suggested that the University could consider developing a broader narrative about its response to the pandemic and the various challenges experienced. The Vice-Chancellor noted that communications had been primarily factual in nature to date, with student/parent communications targeted at school level, but that this suggestion would be considered;
- Some aspects of the blended learning approach adopted during the pandemic had worked particularly well. The Board was advised that positive feedback had been received following a recent external

accreditation panel visit. The accreditation panel had commended the quality of online provision and student outputs;

- Collaboration with the NTSU had been central to understanding and addressing student concerns through Q&A sessions held with students at a local level;
- The NTSU President and the Pro Vice-Chancellor Education had hosted an online student Q&A in relation to fair assessment on 26 January 2021. This had been attended by around 2,000 students, with 400 questions submitted in advance. This had been a successful and positive event and well received by students;
- The Board questioned whether there had been an increase in applications to postgraduate provision from students perhaps seeking to extend their university experience given the disruptions they had faced and whether there may be an opportunity for the University to promote this further. It was noted that there had been an increase in domestic postgraduate taught applications for 2021; this had been expected due to the wider economic downturn; and
- The University estimated that approximately 35-40% of students were now in Nottingham, comprising those who lived locally, those who had remained on campus throughout, and those who had travelled back to Nottingham in accordance with Government guidance. The University continued to hold discussions with Nottingham City Council and Nottinghamshire Police regarding their approaches in dealing with student behaviour issues arising in the community. The Board was reminded that the University had revised the Student Code of Behaviour to include provision to sanction students breaching Covid-19 rules, in addition to any legal penalties applied to students.

(b) Student and Colleague Mental Health and Wellbeing

[Some of the detail of this minute has been withdrawn due to its confidential nature.]

The Chief Operating Officer and Registrar presented the summary of the arrangements in place to support students' and colleagues' mental health and wellbeing. The following matters were highlighted during discussion:

- The University provided a wide range of services and wellbeing resources to support both students and colleagues. Services were available both online and in person. The data available in relation to the take-up of provision were monitored closely by the Director of Student Services and the Director of Human Resources;
- A triage system was operated by Student Support Services in order to ensure that acute cases were prioritised for assessment within 24 hours, thereby enabling referrals to specialist support as appropriate;
- The OfS had confirmed £1m hardship funding had been granted from the Government, in addition to the £0.4m recently received. This needed to be distributed by 31 March 2021;
- The Government's vaccination programme was prioritised according to age and clinical vulnerability. There has been no suggestion that

university staff would receive priority. Governors were advised that there had been not any evidence of anti-vaccine movements within the University community. Where potential concerns were identified, the University could issue appropriate communications, and it was noted that the NTSU could also engage with students in this regard; and

- The University conducted monthly colleagues' pulse surveys. A report on the results of the surveys undertaken between September 2020 and January 2021 would be presented at the forthcoming meeting of the Employment Policy Committee. The Board emphasised the important role that line managers had within any organisation in relation to providing support to colleagues, seeking feedback and ensuring they felt connected, whilst at the same time driving enthusiasm.

(c) Overall Financial Position

The Director of Finance provided an update on the overall financial position. The following matters were highlighted during discussion:

- The mid-year financial forecast indicated that income would increase. The forecast incorporated the additional costs incurred due to the Covid-19 pandemic;
- The contingency sum included in the budget (£20m) was largely intact. The remaining contingency should be sufficient to cover any additional costs incurred;
- The Chair of the Audit and Risk Management Committee had been kept apprised of the financial position and confirmed that there were no concerns at this stage in relation to financial covenants; and
- The University's financial position was underpinned by strong student recruitment.

(d) Regulation

The Clerk to the Board of Governors and Head of Governance and Legal Services presented an overview of the latest regulatory interventions by the Office for Students (OfS). The following matters were highlighted during discussion:

- The OfS had asked universities to undertake a review of compliance with consumer protection law. This would require the University to review the information provided to students regarding how their teaching and assessment would be delivered in 2020/21 and compare this to the actual delivery;
- Whilst some institutions had raised concerns regarding the request from the OfS, the Board was advised that the University considered it to be reasonable. Colleagues had reacted positively and viewed this as an opportunity to demonstrate the good work and achievements at NTU. Should any areas of concern be identified, these would be addressed accordingly. A report was targeted for the next meeting of the Board, following consideration by the Academic Board; and
- The OfS had updated existing guidance on Maintaining Quality and Standards and Reportable Events during the period of the pandemic. The

Board was advised that there were no concerns in relation to compliance in this regard at NTU.

(e) Implications for Longer-term Strategy

The Vice-Chancellor presented the summary of plans to advance the longer-term strategy. The following matters were highlighted during discussion:

- A report outlining progress on University, reimagined was targeted for the next meeting of the Board. Whilst some activities had inevitably been delayed due to the disruption caused by the pandemic, progress had nevertheless been made particularly around digital technology and digital capabilities;
- Schools and professional services departments had been keen to progress the development of local action plans covering the next 18 months;
- The University had developed a number of assumptions in relation to future ways of working that built on experiences during the pandemic and a consultation process was currently underway with colleagues in this regard;
- It was proposed that Governors re-focus on the Strategic Themes as part of the Board Away Day in September, with a series of Shallow Dives that would focus on the KPIs, progress and future initiatives within each Theme;
- A physical “re-launch” event for colleagues was also being considered, similar to that held for the launch of the strategy in September 2019;
- Noting the three-day UN75 virtual international conference, the Board was advised that this event had provided an opportunity to focus on aspects of research at the University; and
- The Board commended the University’s approach to take learning from the past year and to build it into the future strategy.

The Pro-Chancellor commended the work of the University Executive Team, led by the Vice-Chancellor, the Deputy Vice-Chancellors and the Chief Operating Officer and Registrar. The Pro-Chancellor also thanked the NTSU President and his team for their work.

The University was considered to be responding well to the challenges, with robust plans developed in anticipation of further Government guidance. The University was in a solid financial position, with strong student recruitment for 2021/22, and without any significant upturn in withdrawal rates from current students due to the disruption caused by the pandemic. The mental health and wellbeing of colleagues and students would continue to be monitored closely.

IT WAS RESOLVED

that the report be received and endorsed.

21.04 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Board of Governors was scheduled for Tuesday 23 March 2021 at 9.30 am. This would be preceded by presentations on Monday 22 March 2021.